D. S. MIRSKY

The Intelligentsia of Great Britain

Translated by Alec Brown

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THE INTELLIGENTSIA OF GREAT BRITAIN

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by

DMITRI MIRSKY

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LONDON
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Intelligentzia, -sia, *n.* The part of a nation (especially the Russian) that aspires to independent thinking.

(*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 594.)

CHAPTER ONE

THE INTELLIGENTSIA

1: The name 2: Once upon a Time 3: Birth in crisis of British capitalism 4: Before the war 5: During the war 6: After the war 7: In Crisis

1

To the British, tsarist Russia was once a strange, far-away, exotic land which produced agricultural raw products and rivals for the possession of Asia. Soviet Russia is for some Englishmen a torch lighting the way to the conquest of power by their class, but for others it is a terrible phenomenon which breaks all the laws of nature and of history and should be prohibited. But somewhere between the two Russias, in the years between the two Russian revolutions, Great Britain discovered a third Russia. That was a land of great if unusual writers, who showed unprecedented thoroughness in ferreting into the private life of a complicated, paradoxical variant of the

human species which went by the name of "intelligentsia" (with a hard "g").

Each of these Russias left its trace in the English language. From tsarist Russia the English took words like *knout*, *steppe*, and *samovar*—words expressive of medieval tyranny, of a strange virgin kind of countryside, and of the picturesque. From Soviet Russia they have taken words like *soviet* and *bolshevik*, which, though at first glance look just as queer to the English eye, are really quite different, because they are indissolubly bound up with events lying just ahead of Englishmen at home. From intellectual Russia they took only one word, *intelligentsia*, and they took it to designate a phenomenon which was already taking shape among them, but for which they had no word of their own.

The period in which the passion for Russian literature reached its height was the war period. In the years of the 1914–1918 war, when the crisis of British capitalism became part of the general crisis of capitalism, and entered a new phase in which for anybody with a ha'p'orth of sensitivity it was a reality that could not be put aside, the intelligentsia of Great Britain felt its kinship with that of Russia, and adopted the Russian name.

The war made Russian literature a living

factor in the development of the mind of Britain, it wakened the intellectual class to consciousness and provided it with a name. But the crisis of British capitalism had begun right back in the 'eighties, long before the general crisis of capitalism which began with the war, and although the name intelligentsia came into use only in the war period, the phenomenon it denotes goes right back to the 'eighties, when the economic and the ideological foundations of Great Britain received their first shocks.

2

Earlier, in the youthful stage, the flowering stage, of British capitalism, the situation was quite different. The intellectuals made no attempt to think independently of their class, but rather were proud of belonging to it. In short, there were no intellectuals—no intelligentsia—as a special class. There were simply the "educated classes," absolutely identical with the propertied classes, and they were the "liberal professions" or, as they are called in English, just plainly "the professions."[1] For

[1] It is worth noting here that Mirsky finds it necessary to go into further explanation of the English use of the word "professions," because in Russian the word profession is now naturally used to denote any socially productive occupation.

these professions a tranquil little corner had from time immemorial been reserved in English bourgeois society. So long as freedom, initiative and competition ruled in the economic life of Britain, the liberal professions, such as the medical or the legal, basked in an atmosphere of privilege and monopoly, which assured them a share of the profits much in advance of what prevailed on the other side of the Channel. The learned intellectuals of the old universities were even still better off. They were in an especially privileged position, as they were recipients of immense revenues from properties which they had been busy accumulating since the middle ages. Up to the end of the nineteenth century their bonds with the church were very real ones.

This favoured position of the intellectual classes of those days is to be explained, firstly, by the fact that the British bourgeoisie came to power by compromise with the aristocracy, and, secondly, by the circumstance that while Great Britain did not maintain a large bureaucracy, and kept a comparatively small army, it was possible to let its intellectually qualified members enjoy that part of the profits which in continental countries was absorbed by civil service and army. As a result of that the professions were not more advanced, but more

reactionary than their mother class, and acted not as mouthpieces of the bourgeoisie pure and simple, but as mouthpieces of the common interests of bourgeoisie plus bourgeoisified aristocracy—that is to say, of capitalists together with landed families who maintained their position by turning capitalists too. Together with the church, which in England is also regarded as a profession, they made themselves defenders of the exploiter block taken as a whole and the mere notion of "independent thinking" never entered their heads.

The engineering and scientific section of the educated classes stood outside this solid square of conscious, brazen, privileged ruling-class professions. But as the demand for this section was constantly ahead of the supply, it was possible for them, as a class, to be satisfied with a minimum of professional training and so, being devoid of any serious general education, to remain extremely limited in their degree of intelligence ; and the same condition of excess of demand over supply also had as result that they were sucked down into the general mass of the bourgeoisie with such rapidity that, one might say, they had no proper chance even of realising they were a special group.

Indeed, the only group which did at that

time exhibit some signs of intellectual independence was that of workers in literature and the arts. It is possible, even at this early period, to distinguish the intelligentsia type among writers, journalists and artists. Thus we can have no doubt about there being intelligentsia traits in Carlyle, in Ruskin, or in the pre-raphaelite movement. But nevertheless there was no independent bohemian class in Britain till the 'eighties and 'nineties, and those individual examples of the type of people who achieve "independent thinking" make no difference to the general picture of the complete absorption of the class of educated people in the one class of the bourgeoisie. One might well say that throughout the "golden age" of British capitalism—that is, from the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846) and the defeat of chartism (1848) to the crisis of the 'eighties, the absorption was complete.

But even the preceding period of very sharp class struggle up to the final victory of the industrial revolution failed to create a specific intellectual class. Even the "radical philosophers" (that is to say, the utilitarians, Bentham, Ricardo, Grote, the two Mills) were too openly, too clearly cut a class-grouping for it to be possible to speak of them as an independent intellectual class. Even the chartist

intelligentsia was not independent of the masses it led, as the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia of the nineteenth century was. The fact that O'Connor and O'Brien were not purely proletarian leaders is not to be explained by any intellectual isolation from the proletariat, but by their very concrete links with the intermediate masses—the lesser middle class.

3

In the 'eighties the situation began to change rapidly. The rivalry of new capitalist countries robbed Britain of the "natural" monopoly position which had resulted from her history. The appearance of German goods on the British market caused a great campaign which opened the eyes of the masses of the bourgeoisie to the fact that Britain no longer was the only "workshop of the world."

The end of the monopoly position destroyed the class peace which was based on it. Since the Repeal of the Corn Laws the capitalist class of Britain had been in a position to stop all revolutionary movement on the part of the working class by a very well-thought-out and thoroughly applied policy of liberal social reforms. It was nothing else but its *cheapness*

that made this policy possible, and that cheapness depended directly on a monopoly position in the world market. The disappearance of that monopoly killed social peace by cutting at its very roots. The 1886 unemployed demonstrations and the stubborn Dock Strike of 1889 showed that class battles such as had not been since chartist days lay ahead. But at the same time appeared the possibility of re-establishing social peace on a new foundation. The partition of Africa (1884–1885) and the discovery of gold in the Transvaal (1885) opened a new era of imperialism which made it possible once again to think of buying off the top layer of the working class. The road for new enrichment lay open ahead, though this was to be an enrichment much less free-minded and happy than that of the epoch of " natural " monopoly.

The new age produced new systems of thought—imperialism and socialism. In English usage the word " imperialism " appeared to denote a definite policy and the complex of ideas underlying that policy. And the word is still used almost entirely in that sense except in communist circles. The complex of ideas behind imperialism, as a direct reflection of the new aims of British capitalism, was essentially practical and as far as possible devoid of any thought. Its prophets were not theoreticians,

but politicians like Joseph Chamberlain and men of action like Cecil Rhodes. The poet of imperialism—Kipling—is the least intellectual of the big writers of the new age. But with socialism the very opposite was the case. In the socialism of the 'eighties, side by side with a proletarian current (itself extremely distorted by the stagnant remains of the preceding liberalist period), there appeared so-called *fabian* socialism, which subjectively (from its own point of view) was above classes, whereas objectively it was a definitely bourgeois movement—a combination which is characteristic of the intelligentsia.

Now, the social foundation of the fabian movement, and in general of the movement of the "progressives," as they called themselves (of whom the fabians were the clearest expression), was a new kind of intellectual class which had begun to appear. Very gradually, much slower than in countries which took up capitalism later and less whole-heartedly than Great Britain, from the 'fifties onward there had been growing up a new educated class of qualified social workers—factory inspectors, statisticians, school inspectors and the like. This new type was part of that Europeanisation of Great Britain the commencement of which Marx and Engels dated from the International

Exhibition of 1851, but which at first went very slowly. It was only in the 'eighties, when British capitalism was compelled to undergo thorough reconstruction, that the growth of this new intellectual class began to be rapid.

The reform of local government created a huge demand for new men. These were joined by another current—that caused by the foundation in London and a number of large industrial towns of new universities, of a type very different from the old ecclesiastico-aristocratic nests of Oxford and Cambridge. The most advanced and acute symptom of the new tendency in the field of higher education is to be seen in the London School of Economics, founded in the year 1880, and from the very start very close to the movement for bourgeois socialism. New technical colleges were founded, and gradually the place of the old corps of purely practical engineers and industrial scientists was taken by a new corps of that continental type of technologists, which was one of the reasons for the superiority of German capitalism over British capitalism. The reform of the elementary- and secondary-school systems, with the establishment of a centralised state system in place of the church schools and self-supporting institutions, made

possible the formation of a lower educated class of which up till then there had been no sign. And though it approached the continental type, the new intelligentsia was freer from feudal class or militarist and bureaucratic traditions than the continental model. It was a democratic intelligentsia, and it was the exact opposite of the old " professions " in that it was not more reactionary, but more advanced, than its mother class. It was not bound up with the stagnant remains of the past, but its very foundation was a direct denial of the past. What is more, the new intelligentsia, as a class, was not directly interested in the process of capitalistic production. All this made it possible for it to consider itself " outside " or " above " classes. It produced a conception of itself as an embodiment of " society as a whole "—as an organ of the state in its most progressive aspect.

The new intelligentsia, as such, felt no attraction to socialism, but its appearance was nevertheless a symptom of the same crisis, of which the chief symptom was the new wave of acute struggles of the proletariat—the 1886 demonstrations of the unemployed and the strike of 1889—and which was the beginning of a turnover on the part of the working class from traditional liberalism to an independent

class policy. The spectre of social revolution which had not visited Great Britain since the days of chartism once again showed in its ominous form, and it was inevitable that some more intelligent members of that new intelligentsia should understand that it was up to them to make up to the new revolutionary movement, in order to master it and deflect it into some harmless channel.

This was the task which the fabians undertook. Engels characterised them beautifully in his letter to Sorge of January 18th, 1893, as "an ambitious group ["*eine Bande von Strebern*"] here in London who have understanding enough to realise the inevitability of the social revolution, but who could not possibly entrust this gigantic task to the rough proletariat alone and are therefore kind enough to set themselves at its head. Fear of the revolution is their fundamental principle" (see *Correspondence of Marx and Engels* (1934), p. 505). But incidentally, in that great work of saving capitalism from the revolutionary proletariat, the fabians came on certain elements in socialism which they saw would be extremely useful as a means of tuning up capitalism itself for Great Britain and increasing its power of competition.

The subjective mainspring of fabianism was fear of revolution. Objectively the essence of

that movement, as indeed of the whole "progressive" movement, is to be seen in the indispensability for British capitalism of adapting itself to the new situation—that is to say, of making proper allowance for the fact that it had not merely ceased to have the monopoly, but had also ceased to be the last word in capitalist methods. It was essential to get rid of the technical and organisational backwardness which had resulted from the easy halcyon days; it was essential to "Europeanise" and "modernise"; it was essential to clear away the cobwebs of *laisser-faire* and learn Bismarck's lesson. Thus in their striving to find the best solution of this problem, and of the no less important problem of finding new forms and a new foundation for social peace with the working class, these fabians, who were really but theoreticians of rationalisation, found a justification for their socialistic wrapping. In the guise of a general criticism of capitalism they put forward a criticism of British capitalism of the epoch of trade monopoly, with its belief in automatic adjustments and the panacea of competition, and its oligarchic debris taken over from the century-old partnership between the British bourgeoisie and dividend-drawing aristocracy. When they attacked —with equal bitterness—either antiquated

Manchester radicalism or the ecclesiastical oligarchic conservatism of the tories, the fabians did this not in the interests of the working class, but in the interests of "society as a whole," which, of course, meant nothing else but the same old capitalism, though of course overhauled and brought up to date. But this very fact that the leading group of the intelligentsia of the bourgeoisie of Great Britain, even if only in words, denied its class, was a striking symptom of the crisis which lay ahead, and of the dissatisfaction of British capitalism with its own civilisation. The intelligentsia, with that talk of the interests of "society as a whole," began to lay claim to a special position, independent of any basic classes, which meant steering a tacking course between them.

This socialism of the progressive intelligentsia was, historically, a cunning manœuvre, a protective measure of capitalism during its transformation into imperialism. But side by side with this intelligentsia the crisis of British capitalism produced another type of intelligentsia, which also considered itself something apart from the bourgeoisie, but which was not a protective reaction. It was a pathological symptom of the crisis. This was the bohemian, "highbrow," individualistic intelligentsia of

those who did not fit in, those who had no seat at the capitalist banquet-table. Unemployed intellectuals who do not fit in there have always been, but under the conditions of the "golden age" of industrial capitalism, under the irresistible pressure of the dead weight of public opinion, those unfortunates saw themselves with the eyes of their class, and had no pity for themselves. But now, under the conditions of deepening crisis, they shook off the nightmare burden of the condemnation of their class. In the general confusion and shifting of values such intellectuals, whether failure or freak, came to the firm conclusion that their failure was not a result of any defect in themselves, but, on the contrary, proceeded from their superiority to the common herd of their class, their superiority to that miserable middle-class mass which was incapable of understanding art or poetry.

Bohemians appeared on the scene, and also highbrows—persons who looked down with scorn on the swarming mass of humanity and their grubbing monetary interests. Yet the ideas and the values of that bohemian world were nothing more than a product—though, of course, sometimes a very pretty product, glowing with a fitting phosphorescence—of that very species from which they so haughtily drew

back. They neither criticised bourgeois society from the standpoint of a new class, nor even of the new problems of the old class (as the fabians did), but from the standpoint of their own private tastes and fantasies, which were those of the diseased and anomalous requirements of individuals with nowhere to go and nobody to go there for. Thus in the 'eighties and the 'nineties—the period of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley—we see the first flowering of a British class of bohemians and of a British decadent individualism.

But there was more in the individualistic revolt against the established bourgeois system than a bohemian decadence. Together with the protest of the failures thrown out of life by the merciless machine of the capitalist struggle for existence there grew a powerful, healthy protest—that of the lower, oppressed groups of the ruling class—a protest made in their struggle to rise higher. One of these groups was formed by women, and bourgeois feminism is one of the most characteristic elements in the fermentation which attacked the educated classes of Great Britain in the 'eighties and 'nineties. The individualism of this new intelligentsia was intimately connected with the bourgeois socialist movement. Together they attacked the shabby ruling clique of aristocracy

and church, and the equally shabby bourgeois puritan practice of cant.

In economics the demand of the new intelligentsia was for more organisation, which it called "socialism." In individual life it demanded more freedom. But at the bottom of both these demands we have rationalisation —in one case the removal of irrational anarchy, in the other, the removal of irrational restrictions. The most striking personification of both these aims of the progressive movement of the close of the nineteenth century is—Mr George Bernard Shaw.

4

The opening of the new century brought Great Britain a brief breathing space of hope, a sort of Indian summer (or, as we say in Russia, an "old wives' summer") of British capitalism. Imperialism now became the established order—those who had not been aware of this had had it drummed into them quite noisily enough by the "Boer war" for the possession of the Transvaal goldfields. The contradictions contained in imperialism had not yet brought the world-wide explosion of 1914–1918 and the general crisis of capitalism.

Those years of pre-crisis imperialism were years of illusions and hopes such as had not been seen for a long time.

The growth of productive forces, built on a very rapid imperialist expansion and the new "technical revolution" which had begun, resulted in a boom quite reminiscent of the best days of industrial capitalism. An enormous growth of parasitic profits and super-profits made it possible to bribe the upper layer of the working class on a generous scale. At the same time there was an increase in that intermediate class of the black-coated employees of capitalism, which are the backbone of all kinds of reformism. And on the crest of that wave, up and up, higher and higher, went the new progressive intelligentsia. These new intellectuals were fiercely critical of all that was out of date in capitalism ; they insisted on rationalisation and progress and democracy. They were completely disgusted by the reactionary policy of the conservative party, and at the same time "reliable intuition" persuaded them that the future was in their hands, that all they had to do was try—and at the next elections the conservatives would be defeated and at last those revolutions which in the past had cost blood and steel would be achieved by the much nicer method of filling in ballot papers. The French

revolution ousted one ruling class and put another, with different ideals, in its place. This procedure was now to be made possible for the British nation once every seven years—by means of universal suffrage. Thus, Bernard Shaw wrote in 1904, in Britain revolution became a national institution.

And indeed the crushing defeat of the conservative party the following year by a combination of liberals and labour party could not but seem a revolution as predicted. And although but little of the election programme of the liberals was carried out, all the same the series of reforms connected with the name of Mr Lloyd George (the introduction of social insurance, taxation of the landowners, the disestablishment of the church of Wales, and a limitation of the powers of the House of Lords) did have the effect of democratising British capitalism.

The one reason why this glorious time, all these rainbow prospects, were possible, was the success of imperialism before the contradictions inherent in the system had had time to make themselves felt. But imperialism then seemed to be a chance phenomenon connected with the past, not the future, less a system than a policy resulting from some hangovers of feudalism and absolutism, which,

though not yet dead, were fated to die, and of course nothing so final as "the highest stage of capitalism." And so, in spite of the very troublesome signs which grew ever more frequent, the liberal era of Lloyd George was a period of illusions and hopes which collapsed only in August 1914.

But there was a more noticeable and more obvious break in the good time from another side. The social peace purchased at the price of imperial plunder did not last long. The workers soon realised that the liberals had swindled them, had put them off with shoddy demagogic concessions at the cost of the landed interests. The working-class movement made a great leap ahead, and left the outbursts of the 'eighties far behind and if not in revolutionary consciousness, at least in mass demonstration, even the chartist movement too. The British proletariat continued to follow the reformists, but at least it now made a definitive break with the open capitalist parties. The working-class wave of 1911–1913 passed under reformist slogans, but the demonstrations of those years were on such a fine scale, and so clearly opposed class to class, that the progressive intelligentsia's confidence that all was well began to be shaken.

The thunder of the approaching storm of

war sounded closer and closer. At home, too, the atmosphere became very sultry, not at all like the fresh air of the contented liberal days. It seemed as if the world was going crazy. Black-hundred gangs in Ireland began to prepare civil war against the autonomists, and officers of the British army openly refused to obey the liberal government's orders when that government sent them against the rebels. And in London the hysterical suffragette movement appeared on the scene, and the government fought against it with an obstinacy which at first glance may seem very strange. Of course, the truth is that it suited the government's plans very well to make as much pother as possible about that perfectly frivolous, typically intellectual, movement, in order for the time being to keep people's attention off the proletarian movement, which was temporarily at a lull. But viewed as a stage in the development of the intelligentsia of Great Britain the " revolt " of the suffragettes is more important. It is the only time this intelligentsia has come out in the streets in demonstrations, and as far as it went the movement was a signal of some significance. This feminist movement, which began so full of common sense and so gladly and optimistically, with Shaw and the fabians as supporters, suddenly

became hysterical and abnormal, and was thus a warning symptom of a more serious, more profound break-up of the intelligentsia.

The suffragette movement boils down to this : it was the most sensational result hitherto seen of the breaking-point to which the intelligentsia, as a class, was coming. In those last years before 1914 quite different moods began to take the place of that democratic optimism which till so recently had fluttered intellectual hearts. One group—the slicker members of the progressive intellectuals—began to realise that a more powerful specific was needed if the working class was to be fooled any longer, and so they began to toy with revolutionary phrases and quasi-revolutionary theory. In another group, estheticism and individualism, which had practically disappeared during the years of liberalism, began to raise their head. In 1911 appeared D. H. Lawrence's first book, and in the same year the " Georgian Poets " movement began, and, from the forgetfulness of the 'nineties, fished out the somewhat dusty slogan of " Art for Art's Sake." But these symptoms had not reached the point of making a conclusive picture when the war began.

5

The commencement of the war in 1914 was the commencement of the general crisis of capitalism, and at the same time marked a sharp change in the crisis of British capitalism in particular. The British intelligentsia now exhibited eminent class sensitivity. They realised this change. The era of democratic optimism now snapped off sharp. The bulk of the progressive intelligentsia surrendered without conditions to the leadership of the bourgeoisie, and took up the service of British imperialism, not because they were made to, but because it was in their hearts. Yet for masses of the younger generation of the intelligentsia class the war was a tragedy. Faith in progress or in any sense in existence was destroyed at a stroke. The young generation of 1914–1918 was ruined, an empty waste. Those powers of progress in which the progressives of the nineteen-hundreds had taught them to believe had vanished like soap bubbles, and left nothing but a tiny spot of stickiness. Reality for them was an evil and a cruel chaos. The historical chaos took a very concrete form for those individuals—the form of a hell of trenches and enemy fire—and the agony of the British intelligentsia was often expressed

individually as the agony of the sufferings of war-neurosis.

There is no need to make a lot of the " tragic " nature of the break. It was confined to the class of the bourgeois intelligentsia and the educated members of the ruling class, who all had some refuge even after they had lost their faith in any sense in history ; and hand in hand with the agonised individualism of " war victims " there grew up another current contributed by the parasitic bourgeoisie—that of a pure morbid revelling in their individualism and estheticism. There had, of course, been something of all this before, but it was only now there were the necessary social conditions for such individualism to couple with this individualism of intellectuals who had lost all illusions which had become a social phenomenon of very wide significance.

Then the February revolution, the entry of the U.S.A. into the war, and all the noise about Wilson's " democratic " proposals, caused a partial revival of the optimistic mood of pre-war progressivism. The victory of the entente powers, accompanied as it was by an apparent strengthening of democracy (introduction of general suffrage), was met by the lesser middle-class masses with a furore of demagogic lies such as had never been seen before. To some

extent the progressive intellectuals were themselves caught up in that flood of demagogy—to some extent it was they who busied themselves fabricating it. It is the dense smoke-cloud of those lies and illusions, and the final loss by the majority of the former progressives of their intellectual "independence" and the last tatters of human honour, and then the rejection of any political activity by large sections of the intelligentsia, which largely explain the faint response with which the October revolution met among the British intelligentsia.

The beginning of the end of the bourgeois world made hardly less impression on them than the comparatively faint thunder of the 'eighties. The working class, victorious in Russia, got moving throughout the world. In Great Britain the class struggles of 1919–1921 were far more menacing than those of 1911–1913. They compelled British imperialism to refrain from intervention in Russia, and forced concessions—as the price for buying off revolution—which bordered on capitulation. But for the intelligentsia those events—the October revolution and the class struggles at home—were only a part of the general chaos into which war had brought the imperialist world. All the individualists did was withdraw

deeper into their shells, convinced more than ever that in the outer world nothing was good. Smoke-blinded by demagogic lies, the wide masses of the lesser middle class had faith in Wilson and democracy, and considered these proletarian battles a tiresome if superficial complication.

The upper layer of the progressive intelligentsia supported them in that belief. Only a very tiny group of the intelligentsia were infected with a revolutionary mood by the extraordinary rise of the proletariat. But even here most of them were affected by the unbalancing impression of the agony of the war, and produced neither fighters nor theoreticians, but merely rickety and neurasthenic chatterboxes who were to occupy themselves mainly in inter-planetary oscillations somewhere in the great space between the communist party and the labourists.

6

The 'twenties, being a period of a drawn-out but concealed deepening of the crisis of world capitalism, were in Great Britain marked by an intensification and further spread of the decadent moods produced by the war. Such moods

now took possession of a considerable portion of the intelligentsia, and this was specially marked in the superior strata. That despicable imperialist comedy, the imperialist "peace," played a considerable part in all this. Many of the progressives, who managed to keep up their optimism and faith in the entente victory as a victory for peace and democracy, were broken by the Versailles Treaty.

One of the more prominent progressives, Mr J. M. Keynes, is a good example. He took part in the peace conference as an expert. When it was over he wrote a brilliant pamphlet exposing its heroes. The tone now adopted by those young progressives who like Keynes did succeed in preserving their intellectual "independence" was very different from the sanguine outlook of Shaw or Wells in his early days. The skepticism of Keynes and the pessimism of Bertrand Russell are much more like the pessimism and skepticism of the individualists than the social optimism of the pre-war progressives. In the leading ranks of the intelligentsia there was a gradual wearing away of the border line between the two groups, till there was a fusion which produced one of the most typical groups of this period—that known as Bloomsbury.

But even that section of the intellectuals

which managed to preserve its optimism began to be less and less like the enthusiasts of the liberal era. The labour intelligentsia finally lowered itself to the function of open, conscious functionaries for the protection of capitalism and the fooling of the working class, and large influential sections of the engineering and scientific intelligentsia kept their optimism by transferring it from "socialism" and democratic strivings to organised capitalism—to the function of an oligarchy of "enlightened" capitalists. A preponderating part of these people accepted the doctrines of Ford and Mond (mondism) as the very last word for the progressive leaders of civilisation. Wells became their principal literary spokesman, and the whole movement became one of the principal currents of the fascisation of the intelligentsia of Great Britain.

These decadent moods among the intellectuals united with a rigorous reactionary movement in the bourgeoisie as a whole—a common feature of all imperialist countries during this period—and brought forth a powerful revival of religious activity. One factor in this was that these decadent intellectuals felt a need for some form of extra-terrestrial solace to make up for the barrenness of their own minds, but generally speaking it

must be defined as the natural effort of a dying class to help itself out in its reactionary struggle by bringing forward, more and more, all manner of pre-bourgeois paraphernalia. Catholicism took the van and there was a marked tendency to neglect its emotional tricks and make more use of rigid medieval scholastic dogmata. The barren intellectuals here found salvation from the burden of individualism and went through a schooling which was a preparation for the class discipline of fascism.

This advance attack on the part of the army of the church was made behind the dense smoke-screen of all possible variants of " scientific " idealism, from the spiritualism of Oliver Lodge to those public acts of big-calibre scholars like Eddington and Jeans which, however unsatisfactory they may be from a philosophical standpoint, are very skilful and clever from a social point of view.

All these phenomena reflect a profound process of developing crisis of bourgeois culture which, though frequently hidden from the casual eye, none the less went on unremittingly. On the surface the process was, however, accompanied by a number of momentary thrills calculated to act as tonic to the old democratic optimism. One of those surface phenomena—

and the one which was most visible to the intelligentsia—was the post-war growth of the black-coated middle class. The evolution of monopoly capitalism had been intensified by the exigencies of war-time monopoly, and now it resulted, on the one hand, in a growth of unemployment among industrial workers, and on the other, in a growth of employment both in the capitalist and the state bureaucracies. The post-war crisis had comparatively little effect on this class, and the restoration of the old position of British capitalism which began in 1923–1924 resulted in a further increase of the class.

This class is essentially profoundly inert and profoundly conservative. It is just in this class that social snobbery, that very powerful current in the edifice of British capitalism, is rooted most firmly. The smallest clerk who works in a black coat and a white collar is a gentleman and as such considers himself the opposite of a workman. In 1926 it was these people who together with the bourgeois students made the army of strike-breakers. But at the same time it is just in this same class, and especially in its more educated upper layer, that we find a vaguely optimistic progressivism which tends to turn into a sympathy with working-class reformism. This progressivism is essentially

flabby, devoid of ideas, purpose or system. Even the gutter press devotes its literary and dramatic columns and its feature articles to the service of the indefinite humanism and progressivism of this mass—and also completely satisfies them in that respect. It was this amorphous mass that discovered the best expression of its finest dreams and illusions in Bernard Shaw's play *St Joan*, which had a phenomenal success.

Another surface phenomenon which caused an optimistic revival was the foreign success of British capitalism and a partial restoration of its old position which lasted from 1924 to 1930. That success brought no betterment to the working class. On the contrary, it was only made possible by the most ruthless rationalisation at the expense of the working class. From the very outset of that period of restoration British capitalism was on the attack, and aiming at getting back all the concessions made under the revolutionary threats of 1919–1920, and this attack was carried to the point of provoking the general strike of 1926.

The revolutionary vanguard of the working class was defeated in 1926—by the reformist leaders. The result of the defeat was an intensification of the reformist tendencies already present in sections of the

proletariat, and the growing union between the working-class aristocracy (the upper, de-proletarianised layer of the proletariat), the trade union bureaucrats, and large sections of the black-coated workers. The victories won at the polls by labourists, which ended in the 1929 victory, very nearly brought back the temper of 1905–1906. But at the same time the stabilisation of capitalism seemed firmer than ever. The successes at Locarno and the defeat of the Chinese revolution gave rise to hopes in "peace" and "progress." The share of British capitalism grew. Latin America was half won from the United States. In Northern Europe, from Germany to Scandinavia, a new economic block was formed, and seemed a solid foundation for a new economic empire. British imperialism strode buoyantly forward into the future. Even the U.S.A. crash of 1929, which began a new and fateful crisis, did not open the eyes of the British. *The Nation*—the weekly of the "cleverest" of Britain's intellectuals, namely, Keynes (whose pessimism was markedly weakened by the successes of 1924–1929)—wrote that by striking at the U.S.A. the crisis could bring Great Britain nothing but advantage. But the ink was scarcely dry on those hebdomadal leaves when the tornado reached the shores of Great Britain. It increased

with catastrophic rapidity, and broke in the political crisis of 1931.

7

Nineteen hundred and thirty-one was a year of marvels in the history of British capitalism. The fall of the pound—one of the chief weapons of power over the outer world—class struggles which were particularly ominous, because it was rumoured that the "armed forces of His Majesty" had taken part in them, the first time since the eighteenth century (I think of Invergordon) and the institution of a dictatorship which however well got up in parliamentary robes was obvious to all—all this forced the intelligentsia of Great Britain to look face to face into historical realities from which there was no escaping. These unheard-of happenings at home were also thrown into relief by an unheard-of happening abroad—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on which all this time bourgeois intellectuals, if they happened to be "free from bourgeois prejudices," had looked as a touching but naive and quixotic attempt to construct a utopian kind of Spanish castle—turned out to be the only solid island in the whole world chaos. There was that country of revolutionary

workmen, against all the rules and all laws of nature, actually building up a solid foundation for a new world.

All those unheard-of and paradoxical things were accompanied by extremely tangible and concrete unpleasant facts which forced these intellectuals and cultured bourgeois gentry to feel on their own hides proof that our spiritual world is dependent on coarse economic reality. In the first place unemployment now spread to a class which before had been sacrosanct—the black-coated employees—and secondly there was a sudden drop in the tribute coming in from the colonies on which both the intelligent and the unintelligent parts of the parasitic bourgeoisie had built their material well-being. These displeasing budgetary details exercised a certain pressure on the intellectuals, so that they became conscious of the irreality of their former rejection of political life and inclined to take some part in putting an end to the new state of affairs.

The principal result of 1931 for the intelligentsia was its return to politics. That revival of interest in politics was accompanied by an increased need for a world view, for a system. The purpose of this system was to save an intellectual from being isolated, to provide him with a group, to enable him to feel part

of some greater whole, to elaborate a system of arguments to justify the aims of the whole, and in short to provide him with a key to the chaos, the so puzzling confusion into which reality seemed to have moved. I purposely describe it in this abstract way, because the intellectuals I am describing conceive of it in precisely that way—that is to say, as an abstract general need to free themselves from an individualist, rootless position, and come to an understanding of a reality which seems incomprehensible. To be concrete, what happened to the intellectuals, in so far as they were a stratum closely bound up with the bourgeoisie and bourgeois in outlook, was that their interest in politics really meant increased activity in support of their class, which in their case amounts to their fascisation.

The British intelligentsia comes to fascism by various paths. The literary and artistic section go by way of "classicism" which amounts, in regard to general world outlook, to accepting some external authority in preference to personal persuasion; in political life, to accepting the authority of organisation as against liberty, and in artistic life, to the supremacy of form over content. "Classicism" carried out thoroughly leads to catholicism, and certainly catholicism shows the greatest

likelihood of satisfying the fascised intelligentsia which thirsts for " system." But there are paths which approach fascism from the very opposite direction. The scientific, technological intelligentsia mainly goes along the path of Wells' " scientific " anti-democratic positivism, through a belief in the absolute authority of technical progress and a dictatorship of " enlightened " experts.

The process of fascisation in Great Britain is far from being at an end. The British bourgeoisie is still able to utilise the forms of bourgeois democracy for its dictatorship. After the 1931 elections Baldwin, the real leader of the present caucus of dictators, declared that the elections had made it clear that " the people of Great Britain are ripe for democracy." We marxists would translate this announcement into " the people of Great Britain still allow themselves to be fooled by the instruments of ' democracy.' " That is why the iron rod of fascist rule is still not required. But that rod is ready and will be made use of as soon as that democratic " maturity " of the people of Great Britain begins to appear uncertain.

The situation is the same in the world of the intelligentsia. There, too, there is still no definite unitary militant fascist outlook. But

all the raw material for this is already prepared. All that is needed is another 1931—and the conditions of 1931 will be repeated in much vaster and more threatening form—and all those currents which to-day may seem so dissimilar and so unlike fascism will unite in one broad fascist stream.

But the whole of the intelligentsia will not go fascist. An important part of the lower middle-class intelligentsia, which is socially nearer to the proletariat, is already gathering on the other side of the barricades. Nor is the move towards communism limited to those strata nearer to the proletariat. In the upper levels of the intelligentsia there is already a growing awareness of the invincible contradiction between the further existence of the capitalist system and the preservation of human civilisation. The indisputable example of the Soviet Union more and more draws in the better and better qualified members of the educated classes. Many of them still do not realise that socialism can only be obtained at the price of a fierce revolutionary struggle, and console themselves with illusions and a hope of a peaceful progression to a glorious future.

But the bourgeois intellectuals are more and more turning their thoughts towards revolution. The wild orgy of hitlerism in Germany

has done not a little to bring about this result, because it has forced on the attention of the world a picture of what the only alternative to a communist revolution looks like.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROGRESSIVES

1: Progressives and Fabians 2: Bernard Shaw 3: The Realist novel 4: Wells and Chesterton 5: The progressives and the war 6: The labourists after the war 7: From socialism to fascism 8: John Maynard Keynes 9: Bertrand Russell 10: Decay of the progressive intelligentsia

I

THE FINER representative specimens of the British ruling classes in the days of prosperity of industrial capitalism were radicals. But (in so far as a bourgeois system of ideas can be said to be transparent at all) this British bourgeois radicalism was unquestionably—transparently—a radicalism *within* that class. It came out—often enough quite fiercely—against " privileges "—against the obscurantism of the churches, against militarism, and against the tyrannies of landlordism. There were as much demagogic rhetorics and super-class phrase-making as you please, but all the same these radicals were absolutely opposed to any purely intellectual light falling on their class. They were faithful servants of the Manchester cotton

industry and they were proud of their service, though of course they had nothing against letting themselves go on the identity of the interests of the cotton magnates with those of the nation or even humanity as a whole.

The progressivism of the 'eighties and the 'nineties, the leading theories of which were those of fabian socialism, was opposed in every respect to Manchester radicalism. It criticised capitalism very sharply and " took the part " of the proletariat, which meant that it never took up a proletarian standpoint, but instead declared itself representative of the interests of " society as a whole." This marked a new stage in the separation of consciousness from reality, a stage at which the bourgeoisie was no longer capable of creating its own complex of progressive ideas. It needed an intelligentsia which thought it was something different.

But the new complex of ideas which at this new stage of capitalist development expressed the needs and the interests of British capitalism in the best intellectual manner—that is to say, without knowing it was doing it—really expressed them one-sidedly, and much more one-sidedly even than Manchester radicalism in its time had done. During the development of industrial capitalism the progressive ideas of the radicals really were " advanced " in

comparison with those of the tories, simply because whereas the tories stood for interests which were out of date and doomed to decay, the radicals expressed the very latest logically worked-out needs of their class at that particular stage.

When the epoch of imperialism had begun things were quite different. What was progressive from a democratic point of view was only one, and that not the most important, aspect of the interests of capitalism, which themselves were now completely reshaped. The fundamental thing in capitalism now became the imperialist element—that is to say, the parasitic pillage of colonial countries. For imperialism, social peace in the rear, at home, was essential, and the super-profits from the colonial countries made it possible to purchase that peace. The open submission of democracy in the imperialist era to the interests of imperialism as a whole made it impossible for the bourgeoisie itself to create a system of democratic ideas of any degree of persuasiveness. The necessary complex of new democratic ideas could only appear on the outskirts of the bourgeoisie, in whatever section of the intelligentsia was farthest removed from capitalist reality.

Viewed objectively, the bourgeois socialism of the fabians is a "trick" of history, a

necessary completion of imperialism, but subjectively the champions of fabianism were often genuine reformers who believed quite sincerely in the future of democracy and in a social peace built on a rationalised " state socialism." This made it possible for them to be the first to put forward a general theory of imperialism—which was done in J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism—A Study*, which appeared in 1902 and in many respects was considered by Lenin to be superior to the work of the " marxist " Hilferding,[1] who was later to develop into a social fascist. It also made it possible for the best product of fabianism—Bernard Shaw—to take up the cudgels for the working class against the class to which he really belongs, when he realised that capitalist democracies are no longer capable of progress, and that the task of making civilisation has passed to the land of proletarian dictatorship.

2

Bernard Shaw is not the best of the fabians in this sense alone. Without question he is the most talented of them all, and more than any of them has got beyond the bounds of what

[1] Hilferding—*Das Finanzkapital*; Lenin also considered Hobson's work superior to that of Kautsky—cf. Lenin, *Imperialism*, Little Lenin Library edtn., pp. 13 and 84.—A. B.

Lenin called their *wretched* social practice. He has as it were been the focal point of all progressive currents in British capitalist democracy during the pre-imperialist and imperialist eras.

Shaw began his literary and social activity as one of the leaders of the fabians. His were the two most vigorous and most responsible contributions to the first volume of *Fabian Essays*, which appeared in 1889. He is still leader of the fabians to-day. He has written the two most exhaustive expositions of their doctrines which have appeared since the war—*The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* (1926), and the article *Socialism* in the 13th and 14th editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

But as artist Shaw has devoted himself not so much to criticism of the economic foundations as of the ethic superstructure of the older form of British capitalism. It is only the first of his plays that can be rightly called a social satire (*Widowers' Houses*, 1892). All his work after that play leans towards criticism of the worn-out system of morals and the worn-out conception of life, and towards propaganda for a new system of morals and a new conception of life.

Shaw's work as propagandist of a new system of morals began with his *Quintessence of Ibsenism*,

which appeared in 1891. Shaw has never ceased to recognise himself as a follower of Ibsen in matter of morals. This "ibsenism" demands a little explanation—Ibsen played a very different part in Great Britain from that which he played in Russia. In Russia, Ibsen's individualism was understood as a revolt of liberation against duty to society. The Russian intelligentsia saw in ibsenism a moderated form of nietzscheism—a step on the way to that betrayal of its progressive past which it achieved after 1905.[1] In Great Britain the part played by Ibsen was more like that played earlier in Russia by the Saint-Simonists and George Sand, who really were of assistance to the Russian intelligentsia in the fight they were then waging against the stagnation caused by a serf-owning nobility and a merchant class lost in asiatic and medieval murk. In like wise Ibsen's individualism served the intelligentsia of Great Britain as a symbol of their fight against the pettifogging moral system and the puritan cant of bourgeois Britain—their struggle for a rational individualism of free brain workers as against money grubbers bound up by an antiquated class discipline.

[1] Mirsky is here referring to the general black obscurantism, with morbid introspection, mysticism, and cult of naked sexuality *à la* D. H. Lawrence, into which the Russian intelligentsia fell after the defeat of the 1905 revolution.—A. B.

One of the essential points of Shaw's ibsenism and of the programme of the progressive intelligentsia was the liberation of women from the tyranny of the family and their equality with men in the field of brain work.

Side by side with Ibsen, Shaw recognises another teacher in Samuel Butler, who was born in 1835 and died in 1902. Butler is a sort of John the Baptist in the history of the British intelligentsia. His influence was equally great on the progressive and the bohemian intelligentsia and generally on broad groups of the young generation of the bourgeoisie. Butlerism differs from ibsenism in not being a specifically intellectual phenomenon. It was a revolt from within the class—a revolt of the young generation of the bourgeoisie against the despotical class discipline still in force, against the antiquated system of education, against compulsory hypocrisy, in fact against the whole former bourgeois system of life. And Butler and the critique of the gloomy ways of victorianism constituted a meeting-point for democratic intellectuals, bohemian individualists and even the average young scion of the ruling classes who felt the time really was past when it was necessary to submit to all those frowsy restrictions merely in order to impress the lower orders by his respectability.

Butler was not an intellectual. He was born of bourgeois parents and from infancy subjected to the blows of parental tyranny and the complete murk of the tyranny of school, and from early years he cultivated a thoroughgoing hatred of bourgeois respectability. There were, of course, thousands in his position, but that fact could only become socially significant when a new stage of bourgeois society began. That was how it was that Butler passed his whole life in a real old-fashion British way, posing as an eccentric, as an "original"—which had from the outset been allowed in Great Britain as a sort of safety-valve against the harsh discipline of the early days of capitalism. He travelled largely in a number of countries and spent a deal of energy on a number of more or less footling questions, among which were his principal pre-occupations—that the *Odyssey* was the work of a woman, and that judging by the Sonnets Shakespere was a pederast. All that work Butler published during his lifetime, and also a novel, *Erewhon*, a satiric utopia on Victorian England in the manner of Swift, though much less severe than Swift was. But nobody read his work, and it was only after his death, when a posthumous autobiographical novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, and his diaries appeared, that

he suddenly became a spiritual leader of the new generation.

Butler's fundamental ideas, the liberation of individuality and the rationalisation of morals, amounted to a rational hedonism. Butler's ideal was a natural, born gentleman, who was by nature honourable and decent. Butler was quite devoid of any interest in social life, and was not a democrat. Yet there was a strain of democratic thought in his ethics, a sort of rousseauism, in so much as his "gentlemanhood" was considered a natural quality of man. But it was an ideal perfectly suitable for capitalist democracy, and it also fitted the new generation of parasitic bourgeoisie quite well. Everybody was of course quite at liberty to be a gentleman ; though in practice the ideal was determined by the tastes and habits of dilettantes who did not have to bother about earning their daily bread.

It need scarcely be said that this side of butlerism, which was later to be accepted by Butler's highbrow disciples, did not form part of Shaw's system. Shaw's new ibsenist-butlerist system of morality rather consisted in a renunciation of all hypocrisy and pretence, of all irrational survivals, all weight of dead tradition and in the preaching of reason and reasonable trust in one's own good "human nature."

Shaw's ethics received their clearest artistic expression in his play, *The Devil's Disciple* (1899), in which play a rascally adventurer, as revenge for being turned out of "decent" society, declares himself follower and disciple of the devil, whereupon he proves to be a much finer man and a greater lover of mankind than the god-fearing self-righteous pettifogging creatures who rejected him.

Further, Shaw's social and ethical rationalism acquired a philosophical argumentation in the form of a complete view of life which on one side approached Rousseau's humanism and on the other Bergson's vitalism. This view of life has been put forward in a series of philosophical plays, from *Man and Superman* (1904) to *St Joan* (1924) and the quite recent philosophic fable *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* (1932), and what it amounts to is a belief in creative evolution, in the course of which human nature gets better and better till some day it will become divine—if you want to see god you must become god.[1] It does not include a transcendental deity, nor a creator or almighty, but all evolution leads to god in the form of a deified man as the highest

[1] *The Adventures*, etc., p. 54 : "For we shall never be able to bear His full presence until we have fulfilled all His purpose and become gods ourselves."

stage of the evolutionary path which leads upwards from the lower organisms.

This combination of the philosophies of Rousseau and Bergson—of the humanism of the revolutionary lesser middle class on the eve of the bourgeois revolution with the vitalist mysticism of the bourgeoisie become imperialist—is a combination characteristic of the systems of democratic ideas we find in the earlier stage of imperialism—for example, we find a variant of it in Jaurès. The mystic colouring with which this democratic rationalism is provided is a true reflection of the rootless utopian nature of these democratic illusions. The subjection of the Rousseau element to bergsonism corresponds to the subject position of all democratic notions to the general structure of imperialism.

This fundamental combination in Shaw and all the more logical progressives of fabian socialism and an ethic individualism turned all the nineteenth-century notions of the bourgeoisie upside down. They had founded their whole outlook on unlimited individualism in the economic sphere and harsh discipline in personal life. But Shaw proclaimed regulation and organisation in the economic sphere and liberty, individuality, denial of all authority, in personal life. It was just this complete

reversal of the conception of human conduct which was still ruling that made Shaw into the professional paradox-maker the British see in him. Shaw's paradox was the point of the new era thrust ahead, and confidently moving down on the fortress of the old world which had already begun to totter. But as the years went by Shaw gradually turned more and more into a pure paradox-turner, an evolution which is no less significant of the growing irreality of his standpoint than his deity-fabricating mysticism.

3

Shaw is the most striking and most characteristic figure of his age. But the whole age—that Indian summer of bourgeois optimism and bourgeois faith in progress—was painted just the same colour. During these years literature went through a profound change. On the ruins of the old family novel there appeared a new kind of novel—a social realistic novel—the chief representatives of which were Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, and H. G. Wells. But the economic conditions of literary production in Great Britain soon transformed Bennett and others of that *pléiade* into manufacturers of

strident literary brummagem. Yet by its more characteristic works this literary generation did succeed in doing something towards creating a real social-intelligentsia novel much after the style of the Russian social-realistic novels of the 'fifties.

The Russian social novel was a critique of serfdom and a struggle for a more European form of society—the English version was a critique of the outworn forms of capitalism and a struggle for a more up-to-date, more civilised form of society, one more alive to human decencies. But it differed from the Russian prototype in being a critique *within the ruling class* —a critique of the antiquated culture of that class from the point of view only of the new possibilities and new interests *of that same class.* It is true that this critique largely originated outside the bourgeoisie proper, in the ranks of the middle class (petit-bourgeoisie), but yet it was not directed against the bourgeoisie, merely against its old-fashioned forms. Thus, though there is this similarity of the English novel to the Russian type, it is definitely to the right wing—that is to say, towards the specifically gentry-capitalistic Russian novel, not towards the other Russian currents expressive of classes in Russia outside that *élite.* This explains why it is that the first Russian writer

to have an influence on English literature was Tourgeniev. Arnold Bennett once had to write an article on the "twelve best novels" in world literature. They all turned out to be Russian novels, of which—six by Tourgeniev !

4

If I were writing a history of literature I should have to allot considerable space to Bennett, Galsworthy and numerous other lesser social-realist novelists. But in the history of the ideas and currents of the intelligentsia it is not these who are the central figures of the generation immediately following Shaw, but Wells and Chesterton. For all their antipodal differences these two are own brothers. The optimistic uplift of the nineteen-hundreds came out equally strong in them both. Wells's scientific utopias and Chesterton's fantastic tales both equally express the sparkling fountain of jovial sanguinity of those years during which, just before their final eclipse, democratic illusions burned in especially bright and variegated colours—the last years in which those illusions were capable of giving birth to real art and real originality. Both these men lived on into the period in which these illusions (which they

must now abandon) could only linger in the most backward backwaters of society or in low-down two-faced hired preachers. And the two remained brothers (brothers—enemies only because they were brothers) right into the new era—and both have now found their way if not yet to any actual fascist party, anyway to fascism, though by two quite different paths.

Wells is a petit-bourgeois (middle-class) intellectual who has succeeded quite well in getting into the capitalist machinery and making himself theoretical leader of that scientific intelligentsia which is at one with the more live capitalist groups. Science and applied science are Wells's gods. He is an agnostic positivist who believes in the possibility of a mechanical extension of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of society and then the application of that science for the rational regulation of society. In his novels he speaks of his poor relative, the ruined petty-trader type, with inborn sympathy and friendly humour, but he is also without mercy in his exposition of the inevitable end of that kind unless they are quick enough in getting the right qualifications for being useful and necessary servants of capitalism.

In the days of reformist and democratic illusions Wells was a fabian and a democrat,

because the fabians staked themselves for an enlightened bureaucracy of municipal employees, because democracy was becoming more and more a democracy of that special black-coated middle class, and it was only natural that such a democracy would recognise that its more highly qualified upper layer were its leaders. When the war of 1914 smashed all those illusions to smithereens, Wells cast democracy aside, and laid all his hopes on the enlightened capitalist type—Mond or Ford or the like—forming a block with the leading scientific experts. But Wells the Fordist grew to full stature only after the war. Pre-war Wells was one of the most clamorous members of that great chorus of progressives and optimists of the honeymoon days of imperialism.

Chesterton, in contradistinction to Wells, is a middle-class man who has no desire to fit in to capitalism, but defends his ground with extraordinary stubbornness. Chesterton went even further than Shaw in resurrecting the petty-bourgeois sentimentalities of the pre-capitalist epoch—in the epoch of imperialism! But whereas in Shaw the irreality and utopian nature of his democratic standpoint in the age of imperialism only shows in his very modernised vitalistic mysticism, in Chesterton that irreality and utopian nature did more, they

produced an unduly luxurious blooming of the truly reactionary side of the petty middle-class mind.

Chesterton is not merely an idealist. He is also a christian. More than that, he is a worshipper of the church. More still, he is a catholic. His catholicism is a utopian catholicism. His endeavour is to slice off the aristocratic crust and discover a golden age, a petty-bourgeois paradise, in the middle ages. He manages to combine this catholicism in the most paradoxical of ways with a cult of the French revolution—in which he goes so far as to swallow Robespierre and the Jacobins whole—while his partner in thought, Hilaire Belloc, considers *his* two teachers to be Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Aquinas, a pairing which would make both "teachers" turn in their graves.

Chesterton also resurrected the cult of Cobbett, who was the last spokesman of the British yeomanry,[1] and also managed to combine real radicalism with a fair dose of idealising the middle ages. With equal vigour pre-war Chesterton expressed both sides of the typical middle-class outlook—a plebeian love of democracy and a reactionary utopianism.

[1] Mirsky uses the word in the sense it acquired in the nineteenth-century—i.e. that of "peasant proprietor."—A. B.

His democratic yearnings often took on quite a revolutionary tone, as when, speaking of the way in which the people of Britain right through their history allowed the feudal lords and the capitalists to oppress and exploit them, he breaks out with :

It may be we shall rise the last
As Frenchmen rose the first,
Our wrath come after Russia's wrath,[1]
And our wrath be the worst.
(from " The Secret People.")

But in those years of unlimited democratic illusions even that form of petty-bourgeois democratism, which instead of welcoming the successes of capitalism rose against them, could be full of hopes and optimism. Chesterton's ally, Belloc, was able to be an active liberal. In 1905 he was elected to Parliament for the Salford division (Manchester suburb) and it was this very victory which set going the dizzy run of liberal successes which led to the extraordinary rout of the tory party.

The astonishing sanguinity which Chesterton showed, and which burst like a powerful fountain from all his pre-war—and best—work, is

[1] Note that the wrath of Russia referred to is the ineffective wrath of 1905, not the effective wrath of 1917.

a good indication of the degree of democratic illusion of the time. But those illusions were so radically divorced from reality, and their feasibility was so minute, that Chesterton's advocacy of democracy could not exist without an accompaniment of fantasy in his conception of the world and life. With the hearty paradoxicality of a man so charged with goodwill that he does not even care what is coming next, Chesterton made himself prophet of a system of irrationalism, on which he proceeded to erect his religion.

But in reality there was little that was original in Chesterton's conception of the world—it was merely one of the many forms of middle-class world-conception which existed on the eve of the imperialist war, and which a little later were to furnish the demagogic side of fascism. For example, the spiritual leader of French fascism, Charles Péguy, was very akin to Chesterton.

Chesterton's chief claim to originality is in his jovial goodwill, which borders on clowning. And that goodwill was one of the most vivid symptoms of the fever of optimism which had seized the whole of the lesser bourgeoisie of Great Britain, and also the democrats of the bourgeoisie itself, in the liberal period of the first years of imperialism. Later, when the war

came, and in the post-war years, Chesterton lost his bright colours. His democratic passions were exposed to the air and went flat, and his paradoxes became a mechanical trick, so that a brilliant literary one-man circus turned into a mere journalist, who without any sign of fatigue goes on repeating his old turns—and the paradoxical radical churchman turned into a common catholic propagandist ready to sing the praises of " democratic " Pilsudski Poland, or to summon the " democracy " which flowers in Western Europe to come to the rescue of the poor hard-done-by Soviet kulak farmers.

5

When the war began, the progressive of the ruling classes to a man answered the call to " defend king and country." On the whole this was done " sincerely," as it was not difficult to persuade those progressives that British democracy was a more advanced social order than Prussian " kaiserism," and that the war against Germany would be the last war—" a war to end war." But of course there was great variety in the degree of enthusiasm with which the progressives of yesterday supported an imperialist government, and in the degree of

intoxication which got the better of their "intelligence."

Those two poles—Wells and Chesterton—were at once right there in the front ranks of the defenders of "their own" imperial interests. Wells took a very active part in British propaganda work, which was the most stupendous organisation—of propaganda—ever created by man. And Chesterton, who had never been either an internationalist or a pacifist, but always champion of some kind of fighting, either christian crusades or revolutionary wars, immediately flung himself ecstatically (with words, of course) into the war for catholic and "revolutionary" France against "pagan" Junker Germany.

Shaw's behaviour was somewhat different. In his pamphlet, *Common Sense about the War* (supplement to the *New Statesman*, of November 14, 1914), the standpoint of the progressives was expressed with a maximum of adherence to their original outlook and a minimum of pandering to the ruling chauvinism. This was Shaw's argument: the war is a result of reactionary militaristic feudalistic forces, from which we in Britain are not fully freed, but which are comparatively weak here and more or less a thing of the past. Those forces are much more powerful in Germany. A victory for

France and Britain, as countries in which these reactionary currents are weak, will be a victory for democracy. But the rock on which all this "democratic" interpretation of the entente side of the war broke was the alliance of those "democratic" countries with tsarist Russia. But Shaw did not wriggle out of the question. On the contrary, he turned it into an argument for an increase of military power in Britain. Great Britain and France were to make themselves so powerful that at the end of the war they could dictate to Russia "democratic" peace conditions based on a democratisation" of Germany.

Shaw's standpoint on the whole suited British imperialism very well, because it provided a first-class democratic disguise for the democratic intellectuals to get their patriotic aims up in ; but yet it was put with Shaw's usual pugnacious paradoxes, and included a number of very bitter attacks on British militarism and on British political leaders, especially Grey. The British bourgeoisie, which had so enjoyed Shaw's quips while there was no war, was of the opinion that this was not at all the time for them, and his popularity in bourgeois circles slumped badly. Later, in the third year of the war, Shaw wrote a play, *Heartbreak House*, and though in this play he

maintained more or less the same standpoint, he expressed it with such artistic vigour that it constituted an attack on the militaristic fever and helped towards sobering the intellectuals.

In Great Britain there was notoriously a more powerful pacifist movement than elsewhere. It produced an impressive number of refusals to take up military service on grounds of what was called "conscientious objection." The bulk of the conscientious objectors were of the working class, and their refusal was the form taken by their class protest against the imperialist war, but the protest was completely entangled in the old bourgeois liberal illusions. There were also objectors from the bourgeoisie itself, mainly persons connected with the radical protestant sect of Quakers (or, properly, the Society of Friends).

This form of pacifism was a survival of the extreme forms of bourgeois radicalism, and a sign of the backwardness of certain sections of the bourgeoisie, which still maintained the liberal theories of the pre-imperialism period, and had not yet awakened to the real nature of the age in which they were living. It was not a purely intellectual phenomenon, though some groups of the intelligentsia were caught up in it. The most prominent member of the intelligentsia who supported pacifism was Bertrand

Russell, and he was even sentenced to a year's imprisonment for pacifist propaganda, though it is worth mentioning that the authorities took all steps possible for him to serve his sentence as comfortably as possible, and under quite different conditions from those of Dartmoor and such prisons to which objectors from the " common orders " were sent.

6

The events of 1917–1920 looked quite different to the progressive intelligentsia of the day from what they do to us in 1933—or even from what they looked like in 1930 to the advance troops of the two class armies—leaders of the bourgeois dictatorship like Churchill or the advanced workers who compelled Churchill to take his " hands off Russia."

The principal events of the day in the eyes of the progressives were the entry of the U.S.A. into the war, the defeat of Germany, the " triumph of democracy," and the new vista of world progress which seemed to result. For them the October revolution was one of the most horrible results of the war—and the working class advance at home was a warning—a warning to stupid reactionaries that it was high time to have an overhaul and do a little

rationalising. They looked on the monstrosities of the Versailles Treaty as a burden bequeathed by a feudal militaristic past; the future belonged to "democratic" progress.

These optimistic views found soil in the growth of the new middle class—the black-coated class—and in a series of measures which seemed to be very real steps towards increased democracy. The granting of general suffrage, as a fundamental demagogic concession to the masses; the considerable extension of women's rights, which was a direct result of the great increase in female labour during the war; and a great growth of freedom for women in every-day life—all tended to revive the atmosphere of the pre-war liberal days, though in a world in which those illusions could only be fed on frivolous surface illusions, and so were neither attractive nor fresh. The pre-war petty middle-class uplift produced Shaw and Wells and Chesterton; but the post-war uplift produced nothing of that sort.

Yet an untiring endeavour to adapt the old progressive illusions to the new times did go on, and in two directions. One was the development of labour party reformism, and the other was capitalist rationalisation. The labourist intelligentsia had such successes in the parliamentary elections of 1923 and 1929 that it

earned the right of entry to the bureaucratic sanctuary of Great Britain, and forthwith lost all those little traits which in the pre-war period had made it into an opposition. The labourist intelligentsia now found itself a "responsible" part of "his majesty's opposition," which meant that at any moment it might be called upon to take over the command, and this resulted in a rapid awakening of those intellectuals to the rôle they were to play of defence corps to protect the extant social system from the working class.

Before the war the progressive intelligentsia quite sincerely shared the illusions of the black-coated class and the more bourgeoisified layers of the working class. But after the war the gulf widened between the crassly limited, yet sincere, lower ranks of the intelligentsia with their illusions, and the leading upper clique, who now, however "unconsciously," kept those illusions alive as a safety-valve against serious perturbations. As a most typical example of that clique may be indicated Harold Laski, Professor of Political Science to the London School of Economics.

His writings boil down to a pæan of praise of the principles of the British Constitution, the independence of the courts, the absolute value and rights of the individual—valuable weapons

for discrediting proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat. His story comes to this : even if the bolsheviks do succeed in building socialism—a possibility which for the sake of argument he had to admit—it will have been purchased at too dear a price, as no socialism could ever justify those infringements of the absolute value of individual rights with which the bolsheviks have soiled themselves. Mr Laski paints John Stuart Mill on his shield and with those liberal pastel shades confronts the revolutionary working class. He is well worthy of being the theoretician of those who " led " the working class in their battles of 1920 and 1926.

7

The clearest example of the other wing of the progressive intelligentsia is Wells. Wells affords the best object lesson possible of the progression of these progressives from socialism and democracy to ultra-monopolistic capitalism. The war disillusioned Wells in democracy. It showed him that democracy was an unenlightened business of the herd. Those democratic masses had produced nationalism and also destructive revolutionary communism.

Immediately after the war Wells wrote an *Outline of History*, which purports to be a universal history, and which rapidly sold in millions of copies and became the most read book in the English-speaking world.

Wells' history was put forward as something quite different from the standard school text-books with their lists of kings and queens and dates of battles. The most striking characteristic of the book is its author's complete inability to see farther than his nose, his complete incapacity for generalisation, and the complete absence of any kind of conception of history as a whole. Wells does not even produce as near an approach to a general history as his instructor, Auguste Comte, did.

But this does not mean that the book is devoid of edifying political notions. Two such concepts run as threads right through it. The first is that all good things are due to great thinkers. Of these Wells recognises two species, of which one consists of independent gentlemen with private unearned incomes, who enjoy unlimited leisure and employ it for disinterested research into the nature of things. Wells, for example, explains the origins of Greek science by nothing less remarkable than the development of a class of civilised parasites, the patricians of the cities, who were able to give

up all their time to contemplation. The other species of thinkers is persons like Buddha, Socrates, Jesus (on whose actual existence he casts not a shade of doubt),[1] or St. Francis, who are disinterested persons stirred by the spirit to undertake the moral purification and elevation of mankind.

Wells's second underlying concept is that popular revolutions never produce anything which is good. In order to discredit popular movements as such he goes into great detail to describe the Crusade of Peter of Amiens. That elemental stirring of fanatic unenlightened eleventh-century peasants serves for him as prototype for all popular mass movements; though, to do him justice, it is necessary to admit that he deals with most revolutions by ignoring them altogether. The German Peasant War appears as a petty detail in the life of Luther; 1905 is allotted two lines with no date; Chartism and the Paris Commune are not mentioned at all; and October appears as the principal stage on a road which brought Russia to the 1921–1922 famine!

In opposition to his heroes, these gentleman-scholars and prophet-moralists, appear Wells's three main villains, who are Machiavelli,

[1] The chapter on Jesus Christ ends thus: "Is it any wonder that to this day this Galilean is not too much for our small hearts?"

Napoleon, and Marx. Wells's hatred of Napoleon has a real confusion of origins—there is a naive hatred for the great enemy of early British capitalism—naive because Wells is so anxious to make it clear he is not a nationalist—then a hatred for a man who after all was produced by a revolution, and then the last survival in Wells of the man of 1905–1910, and that is, a hatred of Napoleon simply as a soldier, no doubt because soldiers do so crudely disperse the optimistic illusions of middle-class dreamers. And Napoleon, it must be remembered, even when serving tyranny and oppression, did his utmost to keep them undisguised and naked.

Wells's hatred for Machiavelli, who produced descriptions of class struggles then far ahead of any others, is directly bound up with his hatred for Marx. Wells does not dare to abuse Marx quite as simply as he does Napoleon and Machiavelli. He is only painfully aware that Marx created something which he, Wells, would give anything to have—that is, a method of understanding history—but of the unsuitability of which for an apologist of the bourgeoisie he is dully and morbidly aware. Wells is defeated by Marx. Marx becomes an obsession. Wells finds it impossible to use the words "class" or "proletariat" without

bringing Marx in and trying to get in a sly blow. Besides putting things in Marx's mouth which were never there he tries hard to sound scornful and to transfer his scorn to his readers.

In a whole series of books Wells then developed his new anti-democratic ideas for the salvation of capitalist civilisation. They amount to this : authority is to pass into the hands of a caste of priests or "samurai" bound together by conscious discipline and by a sense of their responsibility. This caste is to include scientists and the scientific intelligentsia and progressive, thinking capitalists. Edison and Ford are the kind of high priests into whose hands Wells wishes to deliver mankind.

In actual fact Wells is drawing nearer and nearer to fascism, which is especially notable in what he has written since 1929. The identification gets steadily more obvious. Recently he has dubbed himself a "liberal fascist." The little word "liberal" is there to show how different Wells is from all other fascists. He is not a mere Hitler. He believes in progress and science, he is against force, against oppression, against war, and against nationalism. All this is no mere survival of the liberal days of 1905. Wells's liberalism is there to guarantee his influence on the world of scientists, who are naturally afraid of wild Hitlers, and also on

the wider mass of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois intelligentsia, who are united at least in preferring a peaceful life to class combat.

In these circles Wells is the principal conducting element for fascism. His "liberalism" plays the same part in the fascisation of the British intelligentsia as the official "pacifism" of the British government does in its preparations for war. In both cases all this theoretical denial of force makes the actual passage to force so much easier. The more he is persuaded in the pacifism and liberalism of his rulers the more the man in the street is likely, when the day comes, to believe the yarn that force and aggression are on the other side and forced on them by "foreigners" or revolutionaries; the more ready he will then be to accept brutality and oppression as "indispensable defence"; and the lighter will be the task of poisoning him with hatred of those who, he will then think, have broken the peace.

The less simple in the present ruling parliamentary clique have long understood that pacific governmental declarations are the very best means of preparing a war-time psychology in good time among the large masses of the lesser middle class and those sections of the working class which consider themselves a cut above the rest. "Liberal" fascism, with its

condemnation of terrorism, serves the very same purpose in the class struggle. The hatred of the black-coats and the "cut-above" workers for the proletarian revolution will be intensified a hundred times if they can be made to see that even enlightened and progressive persons, in principle of course opposed to oppression, are in the end "compelled" to turn to the methods of Adolf Hitler.

8

Since the war, then, Wells has, properly speaking, struck his own name out of the lists of the intelligentsia "that aspires to independent thinking." One has even more right to say this of the labourist intellectuals *à la* Laski. Only two of the prominent progressives have preserved any typical intelligentsia traits since the war. These are John Maynard Keynes and Bertrand Russell. By tradition they belong to two different branches of the progressive movement. Keynes is a bourgeois radical, and an opponent of socialism. Russell is a "socialist," even a "left" socialist.

But in spite of this difference between them there is also a great similarity. Both are far from the contented optimism of the pre-war

progressives, and in both the progressive and social habit of thought is complicated by a highbrow estheticism. Keynes views the post-Versailles world with the cynical eye of a man to whom it is quite clear that the whole thing is going to the devil, but who thinks it will last his time anyway. Bertrand Russell views it with the philosophic melancholy of a man to whom it is quite clear that history is inevitably developing in a direction opposed to his tastes and his aspirations.

Keynes has chosen the rôle of Cassandra—a prophet of misfortune whom nobody believes. Russell has invented a new *genre*—that of pessimistic utopias, and no *genre* could better suit an epoch in which all former ideals metamorphose into their opposites. Keynes is an amateur of French painting, a patron of the ballet, and one of the central figures of Bloomsbury, which is the citadel of British estheticism. Russell is the most thoroughgoing and the most competent exponent of the " philosophy of values," which provides the theoretic basis of that estheticism.

Keynes is the most brilliant and witty of contemporary bourgeois economists, and often tells his class the bitter truths. He has won himself an honourable place in literature by his little book on the Versailles conference. The

satiric portrait, in this brilliant pamphlet, of that great swindler, President Wilson, who helped the representatives of the entente to fool the whole world, and was himself fooled by them, is unforgettable. In his rôle of economist and publicist, Keynes from time to time makes biting witty exposures of "stupidities" with which capitalism is constantly obliged to entangle and complicate its own position. But his positive advice is utopian and quite impracticable, though he is saved from proof of that impracticability by the circumstance that the bourgeoisie cannot avoid committing those very stupidities which exclude all possibility of trying the Keynesian recipes.

Keynes hates Marx no less than Wells does. But being one of the most self-satisfied men in the world, he finds no need to lower himself to the wounded malice shown by Wells, and is content to refer to Marx with the same air of superiority he applies to everything else in the world. For Keynes Marx is author of a handbook of economics the falseness of which is clear to him and which has no interest or actuality for the present day![1]

[1] Cf.: "But Marxian socialism must always remain a portent to the historians of Opinion—how a doctrine so illogical and so dull can have exercised so powerful and enduring an influence over the minds of man, and, through them, the events of history."—Keynes, *The End of Laissez-Faire*, p. 34.

9

Bertrand Russell is a larger figure than either Keynes or Wells. As a mathematician and logician, and the principal exponent of English machism he occupies a prominent position in the scientific and philosophical world, and I shall have more to say about him later. He is a figure nearly as central for the post-war intelligentsia as Bernard Shaw was for the pre-war one. He stands out in distinction from the majority of his contemporaries of the progressive intelligentsia by a quality which is rare in a member of the labour party—namely, sincerity. He is a survival of the days when it was possible to combine an honest faith in the bourgeoisie with a faith in humanism. Russell rejects the political tenets of the bourgeoisie and quite clearly sees the destruction of bourgeois civilisation ahead, but for all that he clings to the theoretical foundations of the bourgeois conception of life.

He believes in those human values which the bourgeoisie pretended were its own, but which long since faded away; he believes in the absolute value of the individual, and in "freedom," and in reason. He is a typical humanist, a fighter against slavery and ignorance, and this behaviour in a crowd of sanguine fascist

savages and whole-hearted social-fascist toadies makes him a sort of museum piece. He writes book after book against the old system of education, and against all manner of injustices, and puts what ideas he can into practice. Though in a privileged manner, he went to prison for his pacifism, and in 1925 he raised his voice against the act of judicial hooliganism against the communist party. He has founded a school in which the principles of ultra-liberal pedagogics are carried into effect, and where the children are taught not to believe in god. In all this Russell constitutes the extreme left wing of intellectual progressivism. He does not go beyond the interests of brain workers, but within those narrow confines he carries his leftism to the very end.

But the moment Russell passes beyond those confines of purely intellectual emancipation of the individual, into the open space of the major matters of politics and history, he turns out to be a very narrow-minded, strait-laced person. As an active force in history the proletariat does not exist for him. To revolution he never gives a thought. His view of the future is that war after war will come, that power will be more and more concentrated in the hands of a tiny group of plutocrats, until that oligarchy, being hereditary, decays " like all aristocracies,"

and power passes to a new oligarchy of specialists in pure and applied science who will reconstruct the world on scientific and rational lines. In other words, a familiar variety of fascism—the fascism of the scientific intelligentsia, with which we are already familiar—Wells's "open conspiracy," and so on and so forth. Agreed. But Russell differs from Wells and the other fascist prophets in that this future which he considers does not in the least appeal to him personally. And this pessimism he exhibits is extraordinarily typical of the intellectuals who have preserved a sincere respect for those "human" features contained in the old bourgeois ideology, and still alive in this period of bourgeois decay and destruction.

In the early days after the war, while the whole capitalist world was still blinded by the dizzy rise of Ford's America in the firmament, Russell was picturing the future as a conquest of the world by that America, and asking himself whether such a future was really much better than the destruction of all mankind or a return to barbarism, and answering—hardly. And now, in his recent *A Scientific View of the World*, in which he paints this picture of a world under the rule of an oligarchy of experts specially selected by a perfected technique of genetics and artificial impregnation—

a world divided into biologically differing castes, and ruled strictly according to plan and to science, he ends by expressing his disgust at the thought of such an order, and the hope that this form of society too may perish through its internal contradictions—though what those are to be he does not specify. (This pessimistic utopia has received a literary exposition in Aldous Huxley's new novel, *Brave New World.* I shall deal with Huxley in the following chapter.)

This impotence of Bertrand Russell to imagine any other future than a most lifeless kind of super-fascism of super-experts made in the laboratory, and all disgusting to himself, is closely bound up with his inability to get beyond a mechanistic system of thought. Classes do not exist for him. His sociological generalisations are formal and abstract. For him the Soviet Union falls into the same category as the construction of capitalism in Japan in the 'seventies, 'eighties and 'nineties by means of government subsidies ; Lenin is a kind of Rockefeller—that is to say, a member of a " class " of active, power-loving men as opposed to " disinterested " scientists who research for researching's sake. He certainly does see there are contradictions in the modern world, but he brings them down to the " fact " that

progress in applied science means also progress in military technique—that is to say, growth of man's productive forces is accompanied by growth of his destructive forces. In his view the progress of physics left to itself (or by extension of its mechanistic method on human society) leads to frightful destruction and to worse slavery, and from the standpoint of all the ideals of humanism amounts to anti-progress. But, though he sees all this, Russell is impotent to escape from his mechanistic capitalist-class method of understanding, he is unable to make the necessary step forward to marxist dialectics, which alone opens forth a different kind of prospect of the future. And of course, being unable to make that necessary step, he is incapable of seeing that the proletariat is the only hope of humanity, incapable of believing in the proletarian revolution, incapable of coming over to its side.

Of course actually the case is not that Russell is unable to take the step because he is a believer in mechanistic materialism, but rather that he is a mechanistic materialist because he is incapable of coming over to the proletariat; but his example does show the very important class rôle of the mechanistic system created by the capitalist class, and what a powerful brake it can be on an intellectual who *subjectively*

detests fascism and values the progress of civilisation.

In so much as Russell is a sincere humanist, it is still to be seen if the growing gap between the progress of civilisation in the U.S.S.R. and the growing savagery of the capitalist countries will not even yet bring him over into the revolutionary camp. But Russell's case is an extraordinarily vivid example of the close bond between organisational deductions and the theoretical need not only to fight for the salvation of civilisation on the side of the proletariat, but also to break free from the cramping grip of the bourgeois scientific conception of the world, and to understand that the scientific world view can only come to completion through communism.

10

Not one of the British progressive intellectuals has yet made this theoretical deduction, even those who have made the practical deduction. We can see this clearly in the example of Shaw. Shaw bases himself on quite a different world view from Russell's, one not of mechanism, but of a "god-creating" vitalism. He expressed that vitalism especially logically and thoroughly in his post-war plays, *Back to*

Methuselah and *St Joan*, and now once more, after a visit to the U.S.S.R. and after a declaration in favour of the land of socialist construction, he has confirmed it in a specially clear-cut and unambiguous form in his *Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God*. Like many of his former companions, Shaw has lost faith in capitalist democracy and has wavered towards fascism. But he differs from Wells and Keynes in that he has mainly retained his old intellectual standpoint and has been able to become a force working for a world October.

But Shaw stands practically alone in the generation of the older progressive intelligentsia. Just as that progressive intelligentsia in 1914 as a body turned to defend imperialism, now, on the eve of the new round of imperialist wars and proletarian revolutions, even though not openly, at least clearly enough for anybody who looks a little carefully at things, and sees beneath the surface, they have turned towards fascism. It is true that the labourists have to play a slightly different part. They act as a sort of feint, a manœuvring body to divert the working class from its proper path, to confuse it and disorganise and disarm it, and that is why we describe them as *social-fascists*. It is scarcely an honourable job, and German events have shown that it is even rather an

unsafe one too. But then all *agent-provocateur* work is risky. Fascism when victorious will immolate these gentry, as Moors whose task is accomplished. And thus we see that the sharper-witted among the labourists are already making their nests—the fascist currents within the "labour" party were not exhausted by Mosley's departure, and British fascism will yet see in its ranks many more intellectuals (including trade union officials) who at present are followers of Lansbury and Maxton.

The other wing of the one-time progressive bourgeoisie, the wing represented by Wells, is already openly "liberal" fascist. Nor have the highbrow progressives kept clear. However much the complacent exquisiteness of Keynes may differ from the complacent unfastidiousness of Wells, in actual fact the standpoint of that liberal is practically the same as that of Wells. Keynes's plan, too, foresees an oligarchy of experts closely bound up with the live members of the capitalist class, carrying through a "plan of sanation." The words "plan" and "five-year plan" are most fashionable among Britain's fascists and social fascists.

And even Bertrand Russell, however sincere he may be in his horror of the coming super-fascism he imagines, and however likely it may

be that he will manage to keep himself from personal capitulation—even Bertrand Russell in actual fact does not work against, but for fascism, because his pessimistic utopia is to the average little scientific or technological intellectual a much less evil than the triumph of the great "unwashed hordes" of the proletariat will be.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HIGHBROWS

1: On the name 2: The 'nineties 3: And after 4: War jitters 5: Emancipation 6: Bloomsbury 7: D. H. Lawrence 8: Romanticists and classicists 9: Aldous Huxley 10: The move towards politics

1

In Russian the word "highbrow" has been rendered incorrectly. *Brow* has been taken in the poetic sense of forehead, and the compound word made to mean "a person with a lofty forehead," whereas of course the *brow* which is meant is the *eye brow*, and a "highbrow" is a person who arches his eyebrows in a superior manner to scorn the common philistine herd.

The word came to Britain from America, but it has rather a different sense there—in fact, practically the same as the word *intelligentsia* in Great Britain. An American highbrow is a person of independent views who does not submit to the ruling opinion, and as the majority of the citizens of that country have no

liking for such persons, the word over there is distinctly pejorative.

In Great Britain the word took on a different shade of meaning, and it signifies primarily *the esthetic intellectuals*, those who are "advanced" in their literary and artistic tastes, read books which the common philistine herd cannot understand, and enjoy paintings which most people find monstrosities. Our decadents and symbolists would have had full right to call themselves highbrows in the English sense. The word carries no flavour of humiliation.

But though the British highbrow is not quite the same thing as his American namesake, the American origin of the name is scarcely a matter of chance. American intellectual currents began to penetrate into Great Britain just when Russian influences were at their height, and however strange it may seem, they worked in the same direction. I am not thinking here of the great currents which influence world history—of the influence of the proletarian revolution, or of American capitalist rationalisation on the basic classes of Great Britain, or on the advanced sections of those classes. I am thinking of purely intellectual matters in general, and in particular of the growth of consciousness in the intelligentsia of

Great Britain and of its departure from the established path of bourgeois thought.

The opening of the era of imperialism was the period of a rapid growth of the American intelligentsia. The final mastery of the territory of the states, which was one of the principal causes of the development of imperialist methods of expansion in America, involved a crisis of large sections of the lesser middle class, which flooded the market with a surplus of workless bohemians. At the same time the growth of a parasitic American bourgeoisie produced numbers of super-sensitive educated members of that class who could no longer be satisfied with the exceedingly smug civilisation left over from earlier American capitalism. Thus at the same time, at the two poles of society, there were produced special classes of persons unsatisfied by the crass utilitarian capitalism of American democracy and striving, along two different paths, to escape from it.

In the pre-war years the dissatisfied in America increased in numbers at a mushroom rate, and their growth found expression in a luxuriation of literature there, what one of the leaders of the time called "our first national art." This new reading matter first reached Great Britain after the war, and as a cry of protest it was found to fit in with other

influences of the order of dissatisfaction. Together with America's first "national art" the word "highbrow" came to Europe.

2

This process which had developed with such rapidity in early-imperialist America had taken place in Europe much earlier and much slower. In every European country that same double esthetic intelligentsia had developed, consisting of both super-sensitive saplings reaching above the dense forest of the parasitic bourgeoisie and of a bohemian undergrowth of art. This symbiosis of esthetically educated dividend-drawers and the bohemians of the world of art became one of the characteristic phenomena of bourgeois life of the epoch of imperialism. In America the two partners grew up together, but in Europe apart. France played an especial part in this development. In France the bohemian undergrowth had developed long before the epoch of imperialism. The causes of this are to be found in the peculiar features of the development of French capitalism—namely, in the establishment by Napoleon of an essential feature of the bourgeois bureaucratic state—an apparatus of

secondary and higher education—before the capitalism of the country had developed sufficiently to absorb the products of that apparatus. This resulted in a standard production of unemployed intellectuals, whose activities were canalised by the extant traditions of art in France into the field of artistic creation.

Thus we see, from the romantics to Verlaine, Rimbaud and Gaugin, a constant hyper-production of "advanced" art in France—an art which was an art of revolt, a sectarian art, individualistic and, in the peculiar bohemian sense of the word, "revolutionary"—an art which the common herd of the moneyed class could not understand, and rejected—but at the same time an art which remained essentially an art of that class. Yet for a long time a demand for this art was not forthcoming. The parasitic bourgeoisie was either still too feudal in tastes and tradition or else insufficiently liberated from the active ruling section of the bourgeoisie. It was only when the epoch of imperialism began in France that there appeared, as customer, a section of the dividend-drawers sufficiently liberated both from the feudal past and from the "working" bourgeoisie of the counting-house. At the same time the inward putrefaction of the bourgeoisie made the more diseased and anarchistic

elements in "advanced" art seem especially toothsome to it. When the twentieth century opened the bohemian artist found a customer. He thereupon ceased to be a rebel, or a romantic, and there was a move towards formalism, decoration, and classicism. The two currents linked up. Artists who began as revolutionaries, like Picasso and Matisse, "did well," and the most parasitic section of the bourgeoisie produced great artists, like Marcel Proust.

The parasitic bourgeoisie developed early in Great Britain, but right to the end of the nineteenth century in ideas remained under the influence either of the aristocracy or of the industrial bourgeoisie. The aristocratic tradition meant a dislike of modernism—the industrial bourgeois tradition, the puritan tradition, spoke against all that was free and bohemian or "loose" in morals. Thus British estheticism in the victorian period was not so much a matter of the creation of anything new as of collecting old masters, principally Italian. To this tendency the museums of Great Britain owe a collection of pre-raphaelite paintings equal to no other in the world, and out of that ambience came a cult characteristic of the late nineteenth-century esthetes—the cult of Botticelli.

The principal exponent of that esthetic-ism was Walter Pater, who was completely

retrospective and recognised nothing later than Leonardo da Vinci. For reasons given above in the first chapter, Great Britain at this time was to all intents devoid of bohemians, and of the more bohemian, freer estheticism which should accompany the estheticism of the dividend-drawing class we only find a thin trickle, oozing out at last in the form of a handful of pre-raphaelites, and especially in Whistler, artist and epigrammatist, founder of British art decadence. It is striking, too, that the founders of the British bohemia were both foreigners—Whistler, American by origin and Parisian by upbringing, and Rossetti, son of an Italian *émigré* (and revolutionary poet).

The crisis of the 'eighties signalised by Engels as of such importance in the internationalisation of Great Britain is also a stage of prime importance in the formation of a British bohemia *à la française*. English literature is suddenly filled with quite un-English figures, not at all like either the decent respectable figures of the preceding period or the social literature of the first years of the twentieth century. These were the " 'nineties " in which the trunk of British capitalist culture, yesterday still so healthy, suddenly became mottled with the strange rash of a " French pox."

This new estheticism scornfully spurned

aside the moralising optimism of the victorians, decked itself out most demonstratively in raiment which was quite offensive to the philistines of Great Britain, put on real airs about its foreign nature, proclaimed "Art for Art's Sake," and combined a cult of beauty with laudation of vice and perversion and with poetisation of disease and abnormality. The favourite pose of these British decadents became one of wearied cynicism.

In literature this new movement produced the esthetically naturalistic novels of George Moore, a Flaubertist, and the no less Flaubertian estheticism of Wilde's *Salome* spiced with naughty-naughty paradoxes. The most finished example of British decadentism is to be seen in the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley, which created a sort of canon of international decadence and spawned imitators throughout eastern Europe, from München to Moscow. But British decadentism as a living thing was cut rudely short by the trial and fall of Oscar Wilde. Wilde's crash and imprisonment carried him from cheap posing and snobbism to real human tragedy in his sole surviving work—*The Ballad of Reading Gaol.*

His fate showed that it was still early to try to triumph over the fortress of British bourgeois morality, and the details of his biography show

us how precociously exaggerated was that mottled foreign cult of the 'nineties. The disease those decadents cultivated with such attachment, and flaunted the sores of, was still too weak—or the resistance of the bourgeois body too strong—for it to become endemic. It was necessary for those poisons to go on developing and to eat deeper into the organism of Great Britain, and be drawn into every cell, before the disease could become an organic one, and when that time came the patients would be able to dispense with artificially inoculated French variants.

But even at this early stage the elements of decay in British cultural life were by no means confined to these decadents. Side by side with them were a variety of other forms of revolt against the preceding epoch—catholic mysticism deeply soaked in reminiscences of the continental counter-reformation, in the poetry of Francis Thompson, gloomy Zolaesque naturalism in the work of George Gissing, rebel rhetorics in that kind of provincial Scottish Rimbaud, John Davidson. And as proof that such phenomena were not fortuitous we have the work of writers as firmly rooted in the tradition of English literature as Thomas Hardy and A. E. Housman. These two are very characteristic of their period. In them a note of

cosmic pessimism quite new in English literature sounds with striking clarity.

3

With the beginning, in the nineteen-hundreds, of the era of optimistic liberalism, the bohemian literature of the 'nineties disappeared like a star at dawn. It was never to appear again in that foreign "un-English" form. The atmosphere of crisis vanished, not to appear again till just before the war, after the beginning of which it grew rapidly. But even though the aggressive decadentism of the 'nineties did perish without offspring there are less sensational, but more solid phenomena, which make a bridge from the crisis of the end of the nineteenth century to the crisis which the war began.

The first years of the twentieth century were a period of slow but incessant undermining of the foundations of the victorian view of life, and an active part was taken in that undermining, besides the more noticeable movement of Shaw and the progressives, by the currents which later were to be called highbrow. It was not only Shaw with his new intellectual rational ethics who shook victorian morality, which was the main pillar of the

civilisation of British industrial capitalism. Samuel Butler, who came to posthumous fame in those very years, was John the Baptist not only to the progressives, but to the highbrows as well.

A struggle was waged against puritanism and cant not only in the name of common sense and reason, but also in the name of freedom of desire. Freud with his unfettered *libido* had not yet arrived to take the place of Ibsen, but the sexual " problem " was already beginning to show its head, and long before the war the books of Havelock Ellis, the first " sexual reformer," began to appear. They were prohibited by the virtual censorship which exists in Great Britain in cunningly devised and hypocritically camouflaged form. They showed which way the wind was blowing.

Moreover, it was now not only breezy in bohemian and esthetic circles. It happened that during this transition from the nineteenth century to the epoch of imperialism that virtuous little bourgeoise queen Victoria died, to give place to a jolly cosmopolitan, in the form of Edward VII—the most continental king of England since Charles II. And although the freedom which the aristocracy of Great Britain now regained was hardly the same thing as the rather introspective and solemn amoralism of

the moribund intelligentsia, both certainly do reflect the same stage in the history of the capitalist class. At the very outset of the imperialist era this class flung off the depressing discipline of "virtuous" nineteenth-century capitalism and began to free itself from discipline. It is only the growing threat of proletarian revolution which has made it reform its ranks with the new fascist form of its class discipline. It is also instructive to observe the growth of a liberal view of the very crime for which, so short a time before, Oscar Wilde was sentenced to imprisonment.

The science of anthropology (meaning comparative theoretical ethnology) has played a peculiar rôle, quite typical of Great Britain, in the destruction of victorian morals. It was quite natural that Great Britain, as possessor of the greatest colonial empire, should play a leading part in the study of primitive society. And the circumstance that competence in ancient Greek had long been a social label of the superior strata of society in Great Britain made a comparison between the primitive civilisations of the colonies and the primitive civilisation of antiquity an easier matter.

It goes without saying that the part anthropology has played in the destruction of the

bourgeois view of life has been an unconscious one. Without the least intending such a result, anthropologists could not but show the intelligentsia, which in any case was gradually shaking off traditional moral concepts, how relative all moral systems are, and especially those relating to sexual life. The work of Frazer, with his *Golden Bough*, played no small part in this, and the revelation of the pre-classical foundations of Greek religion and the sexual cults of antiquity and of primitive peoples struck the imagination of the intelligentsia and was of great help to them in their rehabilitation of the flesh.

What steps in this direction had been made before the war we can see from the work of Jane Harrison, a most worthy classical scholar who spent all her life in the strictly cloistral world of Cambridge University, but in her later years took up the study of the phallic and allied cults of ancient Greece. How could folk not believe in the respectability of the sexual function, when its fundamental bond with religion was thus revealed, and the rehabilitation of the sexual act was taken up by ladies of such irreproachable respectability?

Thus both wings of the intelligentsia, though their aims were different, made a united front

against the old morality. But the "progressives," being orthodox theoreticians of the bourgeoisie, even in the new stage preserved much of victorianism. They were optimists of the same kind, and plain men in the same way as the victorians had been. The new decadent currents definitely broke with both one and the other form of victorianism. What is most characteristic of the new decadents is their departure from "plain" ways of thought, from a contented realism, and their adoption of introspection, hamletism, introversion, in short, dabblings in psychology. Throughout the liberal era that interest in the workings of the mind grew in English literature, and went on growing till immediately after the war it reached its culminating point in the cult of Freud and of Dostoievsky.

We find the beginnings of it, just as we do of all other "modernistic" currents in Great Britain, in the 'eighties and 'nineties—and, just like the other currents, it suddenly bursts out at full strength, in an extreme form—in the novels of Henry James, an American aristocrat who had fled from his savage compatriots, settled in the more hospitable land of monarchs and lords, and given full vent to his minutious analysis of the most inconceivably petty incidents of life—in

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which he was the direct forerunner of Proust.

James started right away on a high falsetto which English literature could not quite manage at first, so that the next stage of psychological analysis developed on a lower and more homely level—the traditional form of the colonial novel. In the pre-war years the reputation of a very great English psychologist, Joseph Conrad, was made. The similarity between his material and that of Kipling, the poet of practical, brainless, bestially rapacious imperialism, particularly emphasises the gulf between their real content. The same old yarns of imperial adventure, the same old get-up, the same native populations—but all attention concentrated on what goes on in the mind, not on what happens. Conrad is no less an imperialist than Kipling. His psychological analysis by no means marks a rejection of action or a weakening of the urge to colonial plunder. But the colonial adventure ceases to be an aim in itself and turns into a background for the complex spiritual experiences of these sensitive white- (or pink-) skinned empire-builders.

Conrad was a Pole. His real surname was Korzeniewski, and he was born in the Ukraine, in Volhynia. From the same quarter a still more powerful influence now arrived to assist English literature to turn towards introspection

and the inner life. The pre-war years are marked by a triumphant irruption of Russian literature, firstly through its sensitiveness to social and ethical problems (the later Tolstoy), and then as model of social realism (Tourgeniev). But before long the Russian novel was to become a synonym for the psychological novel. Just before the war Tolstoy's *War and Peace* ousted Tourgeniev, and then, during the war, Tolstoy gave place to Dostoievsky.

4

We have an interesting record of the influence of the war on the intelligentsia, in the war-time lyrics, which passed through a logical series of stages. The early days of the war are best expressed in the poems of Rupert Brooke. Rupert Brooke was a typical young bourgeois intellectual of the ruling class, *series Cambridge*. He accepted the war in an ecstasy of patriotic self-sacrifice, and was killed at Gallipoli in 1915. His poems were canonised immediately after his death, and school authorities began to give them as prizes. His youth, his sacrifice, and his sentimentality were vulgarly exploited—the British capitalist classes could

not have made a better war poet than he.

The poems of poets who became prominent in the second year of the war are of quite a different character. The most satisfactory work (from the ruling class standpoint) was that of Robert Graves, in whom superficially, sometimes satirically hearty bravura passages alternate with neurasthenic freudian fantasies which are a direct product of trench neurosis. Graves is typical of many of those who wrote under the torture of war. His mind stopped thinking of the war itself, he was able to go on fighting, even at times to praise the glory of battle, but his real "I" was busy rooting somewhere inside himself, and tossing up sombre fragments of a "subconscious" "liberated" by his agony.

We find another no less neurotic reaction in the talented work of Wilfrid Owen, who was killed in 1918 just before the armistice. His poems are full of a hysteric sense of compassion and sacrifice, very foreign to any kind of patriotic sentiment. Finally we have the last stage—that of Siegfried Sassoon, in whose poems compassion becomes so intense that it turns into bitter paradox, a disgust with everything connected with the war, and this disgust Sassoon expresses by an agonised irony which is often reminiscent of the later Heine.

(About ten years after the war ended the war material came up again, in the form of autobiographical novels, in which the authors endeavoured to sum up their war-time experience. The most interesting of these novels are those of the war poets—Sassoon with his *Memories of an Infantry Officer*, Graves's *Good-bye to All That*, and Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*. *Death of a Hero*, and quite rightly, attracted the notice of Soviet critics. It is not only the best English novel of the war, but, more than that, the best novel there is about the 1890 generation of the intelligentsia.)

But to return to Sassoon, and the stage we are at. He was one of the very few intellectuals who was not satisfied with a protest in verse, but came out openly against the war in person. He had been a brilliant officer, decorated at the front for exceptional valour, and his outburst was quite a scandal. Yet it had no revolutionary character. It had no connection whatever with the heroic struggle being led in those very same days by John MacLean. It was merely an example of a special form of pacifism assumed by certain groups of the parasitic bourgeoisie who protested against the war rather as a vulgar form of savagery apt to disturb the even tenor of comfortable life. Quite a number of esthetes were pacifists

of that kind, and some of them were even conscientious objectors. Of course the authorities were much more lenient to them than to members of the working class who refused military service. As they were clever people with agile tongues and the right sort of accent, they were so well able to charm the black-coated lesser middle-class gentry who sat on the boards which dealt with such cases that they sometimes even managed to get off scotfree of both military service and prison. The writer Lytton Strachey tells some particularly instructive stories about how successfully he managed to play the fool.

The cult of Dostoievsky began in Great Britain among the intelligentsia during the war. It was a cult which corresponded to the poems of Wilfrid Owen. But it was more than the worship of suffering that attracted in Dostoievsky. Now that the hopes of the nineteen-hundreds had come down to the catastrophe of the war, the incomparably mystical, exaggeratedly irrational cult of faith in Dostoievsky was just what was needed to replace the rarefied naturalistically rationalistic faith of Shaw. Faith in vital forces disappeared, and a faith in the miraculous appeared. This kind of faith provided a foundation for a new manner of viewing life which was put forward in 1916 by

a book on Dostoievsky by Middleton Murry, a writer to whom we shall be obliged to make frequent reference.

5

But at last, not through any miraculous intervention, but simply thanks to the natural grace of big battalions and big banks, British capitalism, though a little battered, came out of the war victorious and began a rather left-handed sort of stabilisation. The intellectuals then became a little forgetful of Dostoievsky as prophet of a new heaven and new earth. Yet the less they believed in him as prophet, the bigger he became as a supreme embodiment of introspection and a great authority on agonised human hearts. The drawn-out war, being not merely the war of the trench hell, but also the beginning of the world crisis and of a decisive intensification of the crisis of British capitalism, now showed in a full flowering of all those decadent individualistic and introspective currents of thought which had appeared first in the 'eighties, had developed insidiously through the pre-war years, and at last became the governing mood of very large sections of the intelligentsia.

The new tendencies went far beyond the

boundaries of literature, and came out as a great movement for the liberation of the every-day life of the individual from social discipline and social obligations. This movement seized on the whole of the " upper " intelligentsia—including in this term three groups: the dividend-drawing bourgeois intelligentsia, the more developed lesser middle-class bohemian esthetes, and large sections of the common mass of intellectuals of the capital. Yet it did not confine itself to the intelligentsia. The intelligentsia now was merely giving concrete expression to something which was going on right inside the upper layers of the bourgeoisie—namely, that " liberation " which was " won " by the aristocracy on the accession of Edward VII to the throne (and let us not forget that during this period the British aristocracy finally completed its fusion with the upper ranks of the monopoly capital lords), during the years of the war, and, especially in London, spread to the widest possible circles of the bourgeoisie.

It is curious to compare this liberation movement among the parasitic highbrow bourgeois intellectuals with that which had taken place before the war among the progressive intellectuals. The liberation among the progressives was marked by a rationalistic approach, by

common sense, by a certain admixture of solemn moral sentiment and by respect for principles. There was a combination of liberating moral notions with a fair dose of severe limitations taken from the puritan tradition (Chesterton has made a brilliant exposure of Shaw's puritan foundations) with the sole difference that moral sanctions were transmogrified into hygienic needs. For example, much was made of teetotalism and of vegetarianism. The rejection of bourgeois morality was far from making those people frivolously loose ; it never even made them comfortably so. The propagation of the idea of " freedom " was indissolubly bound up with a faith in an essential goodness of man. In short, the general tone of pre-war emancipation from moral bonds was healthy, and Shaw, who was one of the most outstanding of emancipators, is also one of the healthiest figures of the whole of modern bourgeois civilisation.

We can get the measure of the difference between the two emancipatory movements if we juxtapose the godfathers they owned to— Ibsen and Freud. The popularity of Freud in Great Britain among the post-war intelligentsia has far exceeded that of Dostoievsky. Freud has been accepted as the consecration of all desires and all lusts, a sort of free pass to

every kind of freedom or looseness, a complete liberation from all discipline. He has become the Bible of this intelligentsia, and sexual looseness the sign of up to date freedom whether in literature or in daily life.

6

With all this distinction between the old and the new emancipation, the " progressive " and the esthetic, they have not remained two distinct and separate currents, but have mingled their waters, and the turbid patch where those waters meet has become one of the most striking features of the intelligentsia of Great Britain. Indeed, it is the very group which first used the word *intelligentsia* and was first dubbed *highbrow*.

This group is specially connected with Cambridge, the university which by long tradition, from Newton to Rutherford, and from Spenser right down the line, has been the university of great pioneers of the exact sciences and of the greatest English poets. Particularly at the commencement of the twentieth century, Cambridge contained a brilliant group of young men who combined a political radicalism with an interest in the most " intriguing " abstract

problems, and further an extremely refined taste produced by study of English poetry and French painting. One of these was Bertrand Russell, another J. M. Keynes. It was in their time that the student society known as "The Heretics," was founded for the purpose of discussing and spreading unorthodox ideas in all fields of culture.

This Cambridge circle produced a group of intellectuals bound together by personal ties and resident in the district of London known as Bloomsbury—the same district contains the British Museum and the oldest college of London University, founded in 1827 by pupils of Bentham—and the group has become famous under the same name, *Bloomsbury*. The principal figures of this group were the above-mentioned Keynes, the biographer and essayist Lytton Strachey, the novelist Virginia Woolf, and two art critics, Roger Fry and Clive Bell. This group established its own weekly, *The Nation*, financed by Keynes, and a publishing-house, the Hogarth Press, founded by Virginia Woolf and her husband.

The basic trait of Bloomsbury is a mixture of philosophic rationalism, political rationalism, estheticism, and a cult of the individuality. Their radicalism is definitely bourgeois, a product not even of Shaw's new progressivism

or the fabians, but of the old bourgeois radicalism and utilitarianism. Thus the weekly *Nation* (now dead) did not support the labourist movement, but the liberal left wing. Bloomsbury liberalism can be defined as a thin-skinned humanism for enlightened and sensitive members of the capitalist class who do not desire the outer world to be such as might be prone to cause them any displeasing impression.

The atmosphere of Bloomsbury is extremely aristocratic, the atmosphere of gentlemen in well-furnished studies. Bloomsburians live amid books, " great minds " of the past (as assessed according to their outlook, of course), and move in the best intellectual and esthetic circles (as assessed, etc.) of the day. They avoid all extremes and abnormalities, though they treat everything which is original and " inspired " with great respect.

Their rationalism and liberalism mark them off very sharply from the common or garden esthetic bohemians of modern times, and also very sharply from the Russian modernism of the opening of the century. Being theoreticians of the passive, dividend-drawing and consuming section of the bourgeoisie, they are extremely intrigued by their own minutest inner experiences, and count them an inexhaustible treasure store of further more minutious inner

experiences. They have a high opinion of Dostoievsky and of Freud.

But even these writers are taken by them without any trace of common bohemian gluttony. They are agile-minded, and of Freudian concepts they make a very special kind of mental discipline ; I may say that a prominent bloomsburian once told me how he had trained himself, every time he wakes in the night, be it only for a single minute, immediately to take up his pencil and record all dreams experienced up to that point.

Yet the interest these people show in Dostoievsky and Freud is quite equalled by their interest in Voltaire and Spinoza. They believe (or should I say, they hope ?) that reason plus education will some day bring an age in which people will be enlightened ladies and gentlemen much like themselves, and there will be no more wars or revolutions. But it must not be thought that they are in the least degree democrats. They see civilisation as the privilege of people who are well brought up and enjoy leisure. Having " one's own room " in which one can escape from the outer world and its racket is, so we are informed by a book written by Virginia Woolf on the emancipation of women, the first condition of civilised creative work. And Clive Bell has written a book which

constitutes a kind of manifesto. It deals with "Civilisation." He informs us that the only civilised epochs in history have been the age of Pericles in Athens, the Italian Renaissance, and the Eighteenth Century in France (*les salons !*). He lays it down that the indispensable condition of this civilisation (in the given periods, was that there was an "enlightened class" which was relieved of earthly cares by having an income for which it did not have to work.

The favourite, one might almost say the national, authors of Bloomsbury are—Proust and Chekhov. It goes without saying that the first would satisfy them. His passive but so persistent and well-disciplined introspection, free from any wild fantasy, is a perfect expression of the psychology of the "enlightened" dividend-drawer. The cult of Chekhov is a little more unexpected. Chekhov reached Great Britain as the last word in Russian literature, and was judged against a background of Tolstoy and Dostoievsky. This explains it. Bloomsbury had found a Russian writer who was completely bourgeois, completely devoid of those distressing rough corners in which, as a result of serfdom, Russian writers used to abound, and when they read him they felt quite at home.

Moreover, what was especially attractive in Chekhov was his technical perfection, the discreet lyricism of his art, and the way in which he built up his story from passive experiences and kept action outside. Finally, in Chekhov they discovered an ethical system which was just like that gentleman ethical system of Samuel Butler, only expressed with far more discretion and finesse.

The influence of Bloomsbury has passed far beyond its confines. The chief propagandist of Bloomsbury, Middleton Murry, is a person in many respects the very opposite of all that Bloomsbury holds dear. The creative influence of Chekhov was particularly marked in Middleton Murry's short-lived wife, the talented New Zealand writer, Katherine Mansfield. But we should say that in the real bloomsburians we do not find so much an influence of Chekhov as a spiritual identity. The study of Chekhov did not begin till after the war, but the pre-war novels of two exemplary bloomsburians, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster, are completely chekhovian in spirit.

Of these two Forster is the less true to type. He first published in the nineteen-hundreds, in the period of the social-realistic novel, and the construction of his novels is more reminiscent of Tourgeniev than of Chekhov. The liberalistic

individualistic chekhovian psychology appears in them in rather a naive form. Forster is a modest, direct writer who has not soaked himself in Proust and does not care a damn about estheticism. But that element of psychological hair-splitting runs like a thread through all his work. Everything is reduced to a matter of personal relationships, of human kindliness and delicacy.

The most interesting of his novels is the latest one, *A Passage to India* (1924), a typical colonial novel of a bourgeois intellectual, in which the relationships between the colonisers and the natives is brought down to a question of personal decency in the treatment of others. The principal figure in the book is an Indian intellectual, a character sketched with real goodwill, but yet all the time from the lofty standpoint of European greatness.

But Virginia Woolf may be described as the principal literary expression of Bloomsbury. She is unquestionably a great artist. She has created her own method, a lyrical kind of exposition of her leading characters—what might be described as an esthetisation of the method used by Chekhov in *The Three Sisters*. Virginia Woolf is even more thin-skinned than Forster is, and she experiences the suffering of others acutely. But the sufferings with which

she deals are limited to purely physiological suffering, as that of a woman growing old, and to individual psychological sufferings caused by the breakdown of personal bonds. Wherever they do appear as socially conditioned sufferings, they are, as in Proust, without exception the sufferings of the parasitic cream of the bourgeoisie. One of the lyrically most powerful passages in her work is one describing the inward experiences of a society woman who accompanies her husband to a lunch with another society woman—to which lunch she is not invited.

But what is most striking in Virginia Woolf is the purpose of her lyric method. This is devised in order to master the particular suffering and dissolve it away. The suffering is wrapped up in self-contained rhythms and sublimated from the world of reality to a world of esthetics. Her lulling rhythms are a fine example of the narcotic function which art takes on in the hands of liberal esthetes, who turn it into a new and more perfect form of dope, though of course one not intended for the people.

We have a much smaller artist, though no less typical of Bloomsbury, in Lytton Strachey, author of "artistic" biographies (*Victorian Portraits* and *Queen Victoria*). Strachey's method is simply the irony of an esthete looking down

with amusement from his highbrow eminence on the marionettes of history. Strachey is full of respect for poets and dreamers, but scornfully condescending to all practical activity, especially political. The irony with which he represented Victoria did for a time do somewhat to diminish the public estimation of that lady, though it did not contain a trace of a revolutionary spirit, nor even of a democrat's attempt to indicate the truth. And in his orgy of irony at the cost of political men who take themselves seriously Strachey falls easy prey to a charm he finds in political cynics and charlatans clever enough to supply the grinning sneer themselves. Thus in his *Queen Victoria* he makes the most attractive character none other than the cynical father of British imperialism—Benjamin Disraeli. After these experiments in the esthetics of irony Strachey proceeded to artistic esthetics, and, in his *Elizabeth and Essex*, attempted to serve up to the British public a queen more in keeping with their imperial hearts than one who was completely wrapped up in her world of industrial capitalism.

Thus did the liberal estheticism of Bloomsbury reach the season of moulting ; its ironical feathers disappeared and the world beheld it in a banal senile coat of imperialist worship of

"greatness" and "grandour" and "the picturesque." But then, that end was only to be expected, since the cultured leisure of those enlightened children of the bourgeoisie is ensured them by what shekels come in from colonial and other dependent lands.

7

But parallel to the well-brought-up esthetic-ism of gentlemanly Bloomsbury, the highbrow currents have also their *Sturm* and their *Drang*, their rebels and their anarchists. The hyper-trophied "civilisedness" of a Roger Fry or a Virginia Woolf is balanced by the flight to savagery of D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence is a writer of considerable stature, and merits (together with T. S. Eliot and James Joyce) one of the first places in English literature of the imperialist period. He was the son of a workman. He acquired a bourgeois education and succeeded in erasing all clues to his proletarian origin. It is true that he did retain an acute "class feeling," but that class feeling, which "left" critics so love to put forward as revolt in Lawrence, as something revolutionary, has not a trace of the proletarian in it. All it amounts to is that he thought of himself as a

"son of the people" of the "lower class"—in the sense of a class more primitive and so more healthy than the bourgeoisie. But that kind of health is a very different thing from the health of Bernard Shaw. It is no better than the reverse of the medal, a decadent bourgeois attraction to animal coarseness.

Lawrence's conception of himself is of a primeval buck for whom the womenfolk of the bourgeoisie, being quite unsatisfied by their decadent weakling men, yearn. He has a characteristic situation which comes again and again in his work—a female member of the aristocracy whose husband is impotent gives herself to a "man of the people," who is presented as a hundred-per-cent crude male devoid of all personality, as just so much male sex. He presented this situation on the borderland of outspokenness in his last novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, a book quite exceptional in bare-bodied pornography.

It must not be thought, though, that this highbrow pornography is something outside the main current of literature. Far from that. It is one of the "heights" of a very wide front of the literature of the upper intelligentsia produced by writers who have rejected society, lost faith in capitalist progress, and turned to the worship of what they consider to be the

sempiternal phallic deity. Thus we see the final stages of the path of the intellectuals of Great Britain from the scholarly researches of most-respected, most-refined Jane Harrison to the bargee delirium of Lawrence.

Yet *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is only the final pointing of the process of Lawrence's art. Before he got to it he wrote a large number of works which have earned him an honourable place in the world literature of the decadent bourgeoisie. Even taking an international standpoint he remains the principal exponent of that strain of bourgeois decadence which is "attracted to the primitive"—to savages (a number of Lawrence's works deal with Mexican aboriginals), to animals (his poems about animals and plants are one of the high points of modern English poetry), and to naked biologic man. The flight to nature is one of the forms taken by bourgeois civilisation as it collapses, and as such is an omen of the coming revolution. Yet Lawrence, like Proust, Joyce, or Eliot, is only a passive symptom, not an active destroyer. He has as much connection with the revolution as the spots which are a symptom of illness have with the doctor who is called to the bedside.

8

Lawrence was taken up by a wide front of critics. The reformists, especially the "left" reformists, hailed him as a revolutionary. Even some communist critics have made the same error. At the same time he became the watchword of all individualists who declared for individual rights as opposed to social discipline and for inward "experience" as opposed to outward authority. Round about 1925 a discussion developed between the romanticists and the classicists which marks a decisive stage in the process of metamorphosis of the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois intelligentsia from an individualistic liberalism to a disciplined fascist outlook.

The classicists led by T. S. Eliot, came forward as conscious supporters of the re-establishment of classical discipline, of a hierarchy, and as open enemies of democracy and liberalism—in short, as the organised vanguard of theoreticians of a capitalist class going fascist.

The romantics, whose principal representative was Middleton Murry, maintained an individualistic position, as followers of Rousseau, Kant, and Whitman, as anti-authoritarians, or, as Middleton Murry chose to call

them, "protestant." Their leaning towards fascisation did not consist in the desire for the discipline characteristic of the bourgeois current, but was built on the demagogically puffed-out emotionalism of the lesser middle class. But the principal allies found by the romantics were the social fascists; after 1931 Middleton Murry became a publicist of the Independent Labour Party.

As was to be expected, the attacking group turned out to be the classicists. The discussion turned mainly about art, and classicism put forward a formalist reaction against the psychological fogginess, and a rigorous discipline of form against the chaos of expressionism, and unbridled introspection. Now, all these elements had already shown themselves earlier, in that movement which resulted when bohemian producers and the bourgeois consumers came together and begot cubism. Yet cubism was still not quite purified of romanticism; there was too much originality and too much innovation about it. It had not enough respect for authority.

An interesting evolution from cubism to fascism has been accomplished by the artist-writer Wyndham Lewis. He began some time before the war as a cubist in art, the only cubist in Great Britain, but something bigger

than a mere imitation of the French. After the war, in a series of books which, though most erratic and disordered, are not devoid of smartness, and a periodical called *The Enemy*, written and edited throughout by himself, Wyndham Lewis tirelessly and very excitedly scourged all democratic and all emotional activities of the contemporary world. His principal butt was something he called the "time cult"—by which he apparently meant the treating of reality not as a system, but as a process, and he argued for the rejection of the dynamic spirit of biology and music in favour of the static principles of geometry and art.

Having a thoroughly labyrinthine mind, and rushing in with all the impetuosity of a novice in consequential argument, Wyndham Lewis failed to produce anything at all resembling a static system. When, in 1931, obedient to the inward logic of the age, he finally declared himself a fascist and began to sing hymns of praise to Hitler, he suddenly jettisoned all those "classical" principles, and in place of a geometrical world conception to serve as core to a fascist world view, out of his hat he produced a zoological principle—*Blutgefühl*, or blood unity, otherwise known as racial tump.

Such erratic behaviour is typical of the intellectual poverty of all fascism and of the

British bohemian intelligentsia in particular. But however different the two may seem, Wyndham Lewis's attack on the "time cult" is no less characteristic of the fascising intellectuals than the far more thoroughly thought out and logical philosophy of "pure action" of the fascist philosopher Giovanni Gentile. Gentile's "pure action" is a complete expression of fascist method, which is, actually, explicitly, based on "pure" blind absolutely non-conscious action by storm troopers whipped up to activity by swindling catchwords. Lewis's anti-temporal "statics" are no less glaring an expression of what fascism is about —that is to say, of the attempt being made to arrest the course of history and put capitalist civilisation, already putrescent, in a cold chamber, in the hopes of keeping it fresh.

9

It was during the 'twenties that the esthetising intellectuals saw their best days and had the greatest general influence on the intelligentsia as a whole. On the right wing was the motley crowd round the petty middle-class *London Mercury*—people far removed from any kind of amoral esthetic extreme, and eminently

suspicious of all foreigners, yet none the less completely assured that literature and art correspond to absolute values situated somewhere above the stratosphere and quite unhampered by the transitory trifles of political life. The real highbrow would not admit the right of those provincial little islanders with their shunning of Joyce, with their pert insolence enabling them to speak rudely of Cézanne, those little folk in the slough of a narrow "made in England" tradition, to be dubbed highbrow. True highbrowism at least demands a knowledge of Freud, a cult of Proust, and respectful recognition of the superiority of *la cuisine française* over a pudding diet. True highbrows make frequent trips to Paris. True highbrows admit no barrier in sexual matters between what is permissible and what is not. To the "strict and particular" highbrows, Middleton Murry and his clamorous apostledom of an unknown god is in their eyes but a vulgar common fellow. They admit religious instruction only in either of two forms —that of openly erotic catholic mysticism, or that of a desiccated formalist construction of catholic dogmata. Their art is free of all enthusiasm, all ecstasy ; it is formal, sceptical, dispassionate and, as a seriously pessimistic undertaking, by its very nature adopts a pose

of tranquil despair. In art the real highbrow does his best to place himself above the common herd by making his compositions difficult or even incomprehensible. I have already spoken in some detail of their art in my essay on T. S. Eliot published in *Krasnaia Nov'* for March 1933. Eliot is the only real poet and the only person of any significance in the group.

But besides this esthetic poetry composed for a small inner circle the esthetes have a more popular literature which throws a sort of pipe-line across the gulf between them and the average reading public and down this pipe flow their corpse-poisons. The most typical representative of that literature is the novelist Aldous Huxley. He is a grandson of Darwin's famous collaborator and a brother of the well-known biologist Julian Huxley. Aldous Huxley was brought up in the atmosphere of science, and his decadent scepticism is built on foundations of scientific positivism and machism.

He began with decadent poetry typical of his generation, but he soon passed to the more profitable form of novels about the intelligentsia. Since the beginning of the 'twenties he has published a good dozen novels and collections of stories in which with cynical irony he describes the world in which parasitic bourgeois

consumers come into contact with bohemian producers. He spices his novels with a very faintly veiled biographical element.

Huxley is a witty, bitter satirist. He knows how to make live characters who live in the pages of his novels in a three dimensional world. French critics consider him one of the greatest writers of the present age, and there is no denying that, looked at from an international standpoint, Huxley does depict the putrescent capitalist class with exceptional vim. But Huxley is not at all in the same order as Proust, Joyce, or Eliot. Those three writers, feeling within themselves the poisons of their own decomposition, have been big enough to create a well-worked-out artistic expression of the blind alley in which history has placed them, whereas all Huxley is able to do is record and make scattered sketches of the decay which is his from head to foot. But he is quite unable to use his records and sketches as material for a work of art, and is completely devoid of historical understanding, so that however harsh his satire may be, through the absence in him of any positive criteria whatsoever, it loses all value.

Yet Huxley's novels are invaluable for those who wish to learn what the highbrow world of Great Britain is like. *Point Counter Point*, which

appeared in 1928, is one of the most interesting. Besides a number of specimens, smartly sketched, of the young and loose aristocracy, we have middle highbrows, ambitious and lustful, but unoriginal, cowardly, and dirty, an easily recognisable portrait of D. H. Lawrence (Rampion) treated by Huxley with servile admiration as a genius to whom all things are permissible, and portraits of other famous gentlemen.

10

Though themselves but a product of a definite stage in the decomposition of a definite social-economic order, the highbrows scornfully reject any thought of the possibility of their creative work being dependent on economics or politics, and this, in spite of their admission, through Clive Bell as mouthpiece, and through many other esthetes who do not make the least effort to justify their existence, of the importance of an assured parasitic income for such civilised persons as they themselves are. Highbrow critics in fact become militant when they come out against the notion that art is connected with any definite period. For example, Herbert Read, a close follower of Eliot, has explained in his sketch of the

history of English poetry that just because the industrial revolution was a revolution in the "material sphere," it could not possibly leave traces in the "spiritual sphere," and so could not influence the development of English poetry. And Edwin Muir, in a book on the theory of the novel, speaking of Wells and Galsworthy, has explained to us that it is just because these two writers dealt with transitory historical phenomena that their work cannot be considered literature, but merely journalism.

But the events of 1930–1931 brought even the highbrows out of their proud timeless idealism. The sharp drop in the demand for intellectual labour struck one wing, and the terrible falling off of colonial tribute which enabled the other wing to be so civilised, had an immediate effect. However high they might have trained themselves to lift their eyebrows, this gentry now were compelled to recognise some connection between their position and balance sheets and the saturation point of industry—and the further dependence of those on the political activity of classes. The highbrows found themselves drawn into the general intellectual mobilisation for political work. And of course it goes without saying that the vast majority went to the right, into one or other form of fascism, and only a minority—mainly

of the younger generation—joined the proletariat.

Wyndham Lewis proclaimed Hitler. Eliot, who some time before had declared himself a royalist (the very term, taken from the seventeenth century, shows the unreality of his standpoint), got Marx on the brain and a number of economic quacks like the credit fan Major Douglas, and began a systematic campaign in his articles against communism. A whole squad of pure-blooded highbrows, and among them such virginally pure esthetes as the Sitwells, joined Mosley's fascistic "New Party." The social fascists got moving too. A rising labour party theoretician, the Oxford "marxist" Rowse, wrote a book in which he called on young people to end their scorn of politics and come and save labour, while Middleton Murry (of whom I shall have more to say further on) announced his joining of the Independent Labour Party.

But apart from the general causes which make for class polarisation, the whole intellectual grounding of the young literary and artistic intelligentsia of Great Britain is such that they are not attracted to the quasi-fascist, quasi-democratic way-outs of the labourists and liberals. It is most markedly among these younger intellectuals that the old anarchism

and subjectivism have been transformed into a worship of form and discipline, and of dramatic action and construction, and this determines their attraction to the extremer forms of class grouping which throw emphasis on class discipline and active struggle—that is to say, primarily towards fascism. But it is interesting to observe that those artistic and literary intellectuals who join the working class get there by a different path from that taken by their predecessors of earlier stages. They come to communism not because they care for the interests of the workers, but because they come to a belief in communism as an organised and disciplined force which can save civilisation—which is strong enough to prevent its destruction and to put it on the right path again.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELIGION, ETCETERA

1: Religion and the intellectuals 2: The evolution of that manner of not-thinking 3: Values 4: Religion on the job

1

IN THE MIDDLE of the nineteenth century "what struck every cultivated foreigner who set up his residence in England, was, what he was then bound to consider the religious bigotry and stupidity of the English respectable middle class." Thus wrote Engels in his introduction to *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (p. xiii) —an introduction of capital importance to studies in the development of ideas in Great Britain up to the end of the nineteenth century. Materialism and free thought made great strides in England in the eighteenth century, and religion had been adapting itself to those currents as early as the nineteenth century, so that it took a form as purified of priesthood as the extreme protestant sect of the Quakers— and at the beginning of the eighteenth century produced a purely philosophic religion like the

Unitarian. But this process was checked in the course of the first decades of the nineteenth century by the compromise formed between the capitalists and the aristocracy for the purpose of crushing the proletariat—the "victorian" compromise which placed religion outside the field of discussion as a fundamental safeguard of the ruling classes.

The result was a sharp break between the development of British capitalism and the philosophical level of its official faith. But the final victory of the industrial capitalists put an end to the cold-storage stage, and from the 'fifties or 'sixties the process of liberalisation of religion was renewed—and grew rapidly in strength too, as the intelligentsia, large sections of the liberal bourgeoisie, the lesser bourgeoisie and the working class, began to drop religion.

The decomposition of "positive" religion followed two main lines. On the one hand the growth of a scientific world conception, and in particular the success of the theory of evolution (through geology and Darwin), shattered the christian conception of the physical world, while biblical criticism smashed the authority of the Bible, so that christianity from a complete conception of the world and all life was turned into an ethical system supposedly inaugurated by a certain preacher Jesus and

compatible with any "modern" scientific views provided they were not based on pure materialism. And on the other hand the very content of the church was modernised. Without much being said about it, ritualistic magic, eternal suffering and all that sort of thing, survivals of the middle ages which the new age just could no longer swallow, were stuffed away in the cupboard, and christianity became "liberal."

The liberalisation was not carried through to any great dignity of the churches themselves. At best they can be said to have toddled after, compelled by the rapid liberalisation of the whole bourgeoisie not to get too far behind, and every now and then giving a little trot to catch up. Christianity accepted every new step in the secularisation of the bourgeoisie as soon as it became last year's fashion, so that side by side with the latest "atheism" there was yesterday's "atheism" labelled "our latest style in christianity." Thus, for example, we see Bernard Shaw's ethical preachings at first regarded as definitely antichristian, with Shaw regarded as a Mephisto, and then, long after his teaching was regarded as eminently acceptable to an up-to-date christian. And in his latest works (like *St Joan* and *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God*) we find

him taking pains to avoid offending christian habits, so that it is possible for the widest groups of persons considering themselves orthodox christians to accept the views expressed.

Now the difference between the new liberal and the old protestant christianity is that the new form rejects the religious content of the historical faith, but sticks to the esthetic wrappings. Thus we see Ruskin, a fierce antipapist, singing praises of the esthetic values of medieval catholicism—and our contemporary liberal christianity rejects both the ethics and the cosmogony of the Old Testament, but goes into raptures about its " poetic beauties." Indeed, the body and blood of a modern liberal christian are made up of a relativist conception of history, and a worship of art as the greatest expression of the absolute in a finite world !

All of this philosophically is of course not at all new, nor could it claim originality at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not novel, but it was not jerry-built, that is the point. The process of secularisation and liberalisation had shaken the old dogmatic christianity to the foundations. This positive reconstruction of religion among the intelligentsia was not an attempt to " recondition " the debris of the old—it was a new building on fresh ground. Just in the

same way as fascism develops not out of the old monarchical legitimism, but rather out of the imperialist transformation of the old "democratic" outlook, so the new catholicism of the fascising intellectuals is built not out of the ruins of the traditional catholicism, but as a reaction to (the reverse of) scepticism and nihilism.

The history of religion in the intellectual vanguard of the working class has been completely different. Half-way through the nineteenth century the working class intelligentsia was far in advance of the bourgeoisie and completely opposed to it. "In order to find people who dared to use their own intellectual faculties with regard to religious matters, you had to go amongst the uneducated, the 'great unwashed' as they were then called—the working people, especially the Owenite Socialists" (Engels, op. cit., pp. xiii, xiv). But later, when following the defeat of chartism, the growth of proletarian consciousness was checked, the liberalisation and secularisation of the ideas of the bourgeoisie led to the same results in the world of religion and philosophy as in the political world. Proletarian atheism went the same way as proletarian politics. Proletarian politics were beautifully bridled by the liberals—and proletarian atheism was

yoked by liberal "free thought." The rationalist and such-like societies which took the place of Owenist groups came under the power of liberal-bourgeois agnosticism. But in spite of its adulterated bourgeoisified form, free-thinking made such headway among broad masses of the working class and religion lost its power to such an extent that towards the close of the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie was obliged to elaborate new mental narcotics with which to drug the intelligence of the British nation.

2

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the task of befuddling the people, in Great Britain as in other countries of primitive capitalism (or pre-capitalism), was shared by two powerful organisations—the church and the drink trade. And both organisations had a great plus in that not only did they do their job with great efficiency, but the more they did it the more by-product of profit did they rake in. Two birds, each. Indeed, in the eighteenth century the church got so enthusiastic about the second bird that it nearly let the first one slip altogether. It turned into a powerful corporation for the augmentation of income from tithe

for, and the collection of that income to, the account of the younger sons of the aristocracy and the moneyed class, all while its flock was growing and also growing more in need of an attention, which it did not get.

But unofficial religion then leapt into the breach, free popular preachers who took up the task of stupefying the people as a sacred duty. The French historian Élie Halévy declares that if at the end of the eighteenth and opening of the nineteenth centuries England was spared a democratic revolution, she owes it in the first place to Wesley, who founded the sect of methodists, which to this day is the most powerful of the sectarian churches of Anglo-Saxon countries. This is an exaggeration typical of an idealist historian, but it is not devoid of real foundation. The " free churches " did an inestimable service to British capitalism. And in the end this had the effect of making the official organisation pull itself together. And all together, official and free, with the unqualified support of the bourgeoisie, which obeyed the most severe puritan discipline itself, and the aristocracy (not without some regrets though did *they* sacrifice their " moral liberty " in order to preserve their wealth), they established that stifling spiritual régime of which Engels speaks as being so striking to a foreigner

visiting England in the 'forties, and which, though badly battered, is still not ended to-day.

But such a system could not last for ever. Though in 1790 the old methods of stupefaction and armed force were sufficient to save the country from revolution, by the time of the chartists bribery and concessions were required. The policy of plain befuddling had to be given up, and one of befooling introduced. And from the 'fifties we see the magnificent phenomenon of the church in the production of social demagogy entering into competition with the class it served. It was no longer enough to supply the simple drug.

There were other considerations too. The development of more complicated machinery had progressively for a considerable time made the easy wholesale supply of gin undesirable. It was apt to limit the effectiveness of exploitation. The "moral" sense of the ruling class began to frown on it. And just as liquor became inconvenient, religion in the old form became less effective. The Salvation Army was the last attempt at direct intoxication and stupefaction, though by the nature of the *quid pro quo* it offered it has influenced only the most backward strata of the working classes. For that reason it obtained but little support

from the bourgeoisie. Engels is witness that agnosticism in the 'nineties was more respectable in Great Britain than the Salvation Army, and here we have sign of conscious recognition by the bourgeoisie that the age of crude methods was over, and the time had come for more cunning methods of dealing with the working classes.

But as it developed further capitalism created new means for the stupefaction of the masses, and these means were exactly like the church and the liquor trade in that they not only made the proletariat harmless, but also provided the fairly numerous bourgeoisie with good returns in hard cash. I think of such instruments as the cinema, the gutter press, popular literature, and the horse-race betting which is a peculiarity of Great Britain. A somewhat finer form is that of the commercial spectacular development of football, cricket, and tennis, which towards the end of the nineteenth century took the place of chapel prayer-meetings as the main means of canalising the emotional energy of the masses.

Yet all these were a substitute only for liquor, not for religion. They stupefied, prevented thought, perfectly, but one thing they could not do, and that was give them a positive rock to which to be chained. Those measures of

stupefaction could provide no real counter-attraction in the form of a real affirmation of the " kingdom of god " to balanced dreams of a better organisation of the earthly world. And the effect of those measures on a growing advanced layer of the working class was insufficient in every respect. It was essential to create a new system of ideas to take the place once occupied by religion. What was needed was some means for guiding the cultural interests of that working-class intelligentsia into harmless channels. More than that. What was needed was a means of training them and utilising them so that they would take over the work of educating the working class along passive lines and producing a proletariat so sodden with narcotic soothing notions that their whole perception of life should be on a low level and revolutionary thought out of the question. The means was found. It consisted in an artistic and literary education in which working-class intellectuals learned to consider esthetic enjoyment the supreme value, and an ability to understand art a mark of superior culture.

The foundations of that system of education were laid in the third quarter of the nineteenth century by Ruskin and the colleges for the working class instituted on his plan for the

express purpose of raising working men and the poorer clerks to the level of bourgeois civilised enjoyment. At the end of the century the new system sent down a lovely network of roots in various labour settlements and workers' educational courses. The movement attacked the state schools and captured large sections of the teaching staff.

The analogy between the new system and religion is complete. Just as christianity had said, " For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew xvi. 26), the new system said, " What advantage has man of material and social progress if his soul is to remain in darkness and incapable of enjoying the greatest delights of life? "

The strength of the new system lay in the fact that on the surface it was completely convincing and acceptable. Its blade was not turned against " socialism " but against the soulless " materialism " of the capitalist world. The cultural values advanced to the new class of " lower " intellectuals by the new system seemed genuine, and the new intellectuals could propagate them farther with complete sincerity, while the propagation was made extremely easy by the growing working-class demand for culture.

But the system had two foundations. One was passivity, the principle of mere acceptance of what was offered—that is to say, on a one sided development of the organs of perception and enjoyment, and on placing this demand for " culture " *above* the political struggle. The other was an atmosphere of humanity, of a super-class point of view of being in the interests of all mankind. The system degraded the struggle and denied class differences, and as such was doubly calculated to stifle the class struggle. The esthetic values of Shakespere, for example, get represented as absolute, as the highest thing created by man, and it is suggested that the enjoyment of those values unites all men, irrespective of class—and thus elevates workmen and small clerks to the lofty heights of the educated layer of the bourgeoisie. The criteria worked out by the most parasitic section of the bourgeoisie were put forward as the criteria of values for any individual. The purpose of the new system of education was to inject into the better educated members of the proletariat doses of the bacilli of impotence and passivity which history had cultivated in that particular layer of the bourgeoisie.

And at the same time—though of course this has never been emphasised in the educational apparatus of Great Britain—it was

obvious that this type of esthetic looker-on could only develop to the full if provided with ample money and leisure—that is, only in the parasitic dividend-drawing class, or in the fat but narrow world of academic sinecures. Thus to whatever extent the appreciation of Shakespere was made to supersede classes, both worker and clerk were fated to remain members of a caste which was " inferior " but privileged to recognise the superiority of the few who were provided with the necessary income and leisure. The social hierarchy remained intact. It was through this result that the new system proved more than a first-rate substitute for religion—it provided a further fortification of that important bastion of tranquillity in Albion —that is to say, it considerably reinforced snobbery, which was so nicely called by a Russian obscurantist " a spirit of voluntary hierarchy," in other words, a voluntary admission by the " lower orders " of the superiority in all other things of those who were their social superiors.

3

The new system was carried into being with the usual British separation of theory from practice. Though the educational machine

took great pains to be conscious of what it was doing in the interests of " social peace " it had not the slightest intention of allowing philosophical conclusions to be drawn from its practice. But with the commencement of the general crisis of capitalism the leading circles of the bourgeois intelligentsia of Great Britain developed a philosophy which provided their educational practice with a wonderful theoretical basis, and the most competent and best qualified intellectuals took this philosophy up and developed it, and the extant practical machinery of ideas was made up into a wonderful logical deduction from that philosophy. The philosophy referred to is the " theory of values." In the 'twenties all good intellectuals who had not already set out for some form of faith or fascism took up the theory of values.

This theory did not originate either in Great Britain or after the imperialist war. It originated at a much earlier stage of capitalism in Germany, in the last third of the nineteenth century, a direct result there of the discovery the bourgeoisie made of the limitations of their possibilities of knowledge. The fact that the scientific method available to the bourgeoisie applied only to physical nature and did not extend to the social phenomena resulted in

Dilte and other German philosophers asserting that outside the field of science man is obliged to renounce the possibility of positive knowledge of natural laws, and limit himself to appreciation—appreciation of things called values.

This philosophy of values provided a starting-point both for a passive estheticism limited to observation, and a willing activism which, without recourse to any manner of objective estimation of reality, attempts to mould the world "as it wants." Thus in the first stage of the philosophy of values, in Bismarckian Germany, side by side with Dilte's pure cult of contemplation we have Nietzsche the activist producing a philosophy which contains the buds of much which has now bloomed as fascism. But imperialistic activism at an early period declared against the philosophy of values for something which it said was more solid; which meant that the philosophy of values became the philosophy of the liberal and esthetic bourgeoisie and of the labour party social fascists who serve that bourgeoisie so lovingly.

In Great Britain the theory of values took the place of Shaw's pre-war deity-invention as leading system of thought. In essence the two philosophies are very much akin, being both

merely variants of the liberal-subjective idealism which ruled in bourgeoisie theory till anti-subjective authoritative systems (fascism) took its place. But the resistance of these two variants was not equal. Pre-war vitalism expressed a belief in the cosmic, objective value of subjective human values—a belief that the "creative evolution" of nature proceeds in the same direction as man's ethical evolution, and leads to the transformation of nature into man and of man into god. This was a vulgarised and simplified revival of Hegel's absolute idealism—a revival which exactly corresponds to the short-lived superficial boom in capitalist economy at that beginning of the epoch of imperialism which to the casual observer looked so much like the boom of the early days of industrial capitalism. The next stage was the theory of values, and a stage in which all faith was lost, no purpose in life left, and all that a refined and educated member of the ruling classes could do was retire into his shell and hope for direct revelation of experience.

The values cult includes a very motley scale of shades, from nearly pure fideism to pure agnosticism, but it may be said that all devotees would agree on the following propositions :

(1) Though science provides us with data which are of practical use, it is unable to give us any knowledge of the true nature of things, or any criteria for any evaluations whatsoever, and science itself, in mathematics and the newer physics, is getting nearer and nearer to a denial of the objective nature of knowledge and a denial of the substantiality of matter.

(2) The only data and only irrefutable reality are our personal experience. They provide us with the sole criterion of values, because the experiencing of values is in itself a value.

(3) The task before us is to link up all our experience of values, either by their simple co-ordination, or by the submission of them all to some superior value, into a system which may function satisfactorily.

(4) The highest, most pure, and unquestionable values are those which are least bound up with practical acts and provide specific forms of emotionally intellectual exaltation, and these values are esthetic experience, religious experience, and sexual experience.

Of course, in speaking of this business of values in Great Britain as a "philosophy" we must not forget how easy-going the intelligentsia of which we write is in all matter of

theory. Even in Bertrand Russell it is no use even looking for a connected philosophy—and he is the most philosophical of all representatives of that direction of thought. The philosophic presentation of the values business which satisfies these people completely would bring a smile to the lips of the average German or French student of philosophy.

Pragmatism had a great influence on these British value-mongers—pragmatism, the most homespun and least scientific of all philosophic systems. Nevertheless the social content and the historical mood of pragmatism are quite a different matter—they are an expression of an active and superficially optimistic stage of American capitalism, and this pragmatism is rather a parallel to Shaw's pre-war vitalism, though with the special traits of American barbarism. Bearing in mind the philosophical poverty of British intellectuals it is not surprising to find that the principal exponent of this British value system is an Italian—Benedetto Croce.

A craze for Croce together with that for Freud and Chekhov is one of the most characteristic phenomena of the intellectual life of Great Britain in the nineteen-twenties. Croce is a typical representative of the old privileged intelligentsia of the west—people who busy

themselves in observations made without any connection whatsoever with the problems of the social order in which they live, but by the grace of which they flourish on a semi-feudal income or a bureaucratic sinecure. That complete independence of earthly cares permits a man to turn to any occupation without taking account of any exterior phenomenon whatsoever—and so take up the pose of an independent man of wisdom which no catastrophe occurring in the outer world can hinder in the processes of his thought.

Socially Croce stands very close to the British intellectuals of aristocratic Oxford and Cambridge and the educated bourgeoisie of the cream of London society. The fundamental features of Croce's philosophy, which characterise him as theoretician of a small passive parasitic layer of society, consists in a denial of any value to all experimental science with the exception of pure "economic" science, an insistence of logic (meaning an aprioristic deductive system) as the sole source of knowledge, and granting a tremendously important part to esthetics, together with a complete rejection of the reality of the outer world and the reduction of history to a succession of ideas inaccessible to positive science and accessible only to an esthetic mode of perception.

To all this is sometimes added as fighting material a fairly fierce denial of religion, the function of which is taken over by idealistic philosophy and by art. This "liberal" trait has made Croce eminently acceptable to liberal esthetes. The thoroughness with which Croce has carried his subjective idealism to its extreme and not merely admitted inner values as the only values, but also declared them to be the only reality, could not but captivate the valueisers of Great Britain, even if the thoroughness and the philosophical rigour of his thought do make him a little trying to the average British reader, by whom he has been appointed supreme instructor of a lower order of instructors, whose task is to vulgarise his notions sufficiently for them to bloom in the less favourable habitat of the foggy island.

One might put it that the followers of Croce are the right wing of the valueisers. The "left" wing, connected not with idealist metaphysics, but with positivism and agnosticism, is represented by such writers as Bertrand Russell and I. A. Richards. In Bertrand Russell the combination of the theory of values with ethical liberalism and in the theory of knowledge with subjective idealism is particularly clear. Russell is the principal and the

most thorough representative of machism in Great Britain.

Richards, a lecturer on literature at Cambridge University, is the author of a book entitled *The Principles of Literary Criticism*. In this work he endeavours to link up the notion of values with that of progress. The value of " values " in his opinion is not defined by the subjective factor of intensity of experiencing, but by the ability to synthetise experience into a system giving the best possible adaptation to actual life. Progress then becomes a chain of such consequential acts of adjustment of the individual to society and to nature, and the value of any human act (including works of art) is definable in terms of the general process of adjustment. This original " synthesis " of utilitarianism, pragmatism and freudism made in a brilliantly mechanistic way and formulated with considerable sparkle of logic is typical of many pupils of Cambridge University (compare Keynes), and in so much as it does subordinate the conception of value to the factor of objective life, it is outside the boundaries of true valueism. In this special form valueism is particularly widespread among biologists and persons with some training in biology. But yet Richards joins with Russell and the others in accepting the theory of a

passive idealist hierarchy of values. And just as in Russell and Croce, in him too we find that the principal values are the artistic and the contemplative.

In a less rigorous philosophical form we find the theory of values at the bottom of all present English literary and artistic criticism, and in some form everywhere in modern English literature. One of its principal popularisers is Middleton Murry. He puts it out in forms usually reserved for lower-class sectarian minds, in a quite revivalistic lingo, so that the objectively historical sense of the theory of values, in his hands, as a heritage of emotional protestantism, becomes a mere linguistic carry-over.

The theory of values in Great Britain fell not on stony ground, but on the beautiful tilth prepared by the new educational cultivator. Down went its luscious roots, deep into the consciousness of the lower ranks of the intelligentsia and into that of those workers who aspired to make the treasures of bourgeois culture their own. The theory directed their activity to introspection and to a passive contemplation of their experience, it denied the reality of social differences, it presented them with the pure parasite as ideal of civilisation and thus (especially among the

teaching profession) in certain sections of the lesser middle class and the proletariat it became the principal instrument for the erosion of class consciousness, the principal preventive of the growth of revolutionary moods.

The struggle against this theory and all its variants is certainly not less important, and in many quarters far more important, than the struggle against the open, brazen religious propaganda of the priesthood. It is a mass phenomenon, and it is part cause of the theoretical work of the British working-class struggle being a more complicated matter than was that of the proletariat in Russia. In Russia proletarian atheism faced on the one hand crude forms of a religion compounded of magic, and on the other all manner of intellectual antics from the blackest obscurantist "broad-minded" affirmation of beliefs at least an "almighty" down to god-creating nonsense actually tricked out to masquerade as marxism. In Great Britain proletarian atheism has as one of its principal enemies this very subtle, slippery, eely, "refaned and enlightened" mass idealism which has just been examined.

4

The importance of the theory of values as one of the principal weapons of the bourgeoisie in the theoretical sphere of course must not be allowed to overshadow the more "positive" forms of religion, which are still the principal enemy.

The process of adaptation went on after the war and left all earlier records of adaptational liberalism far behind. It is possible to say to-day that with the exception of the Roman church there is not a priesthood in Great Britain, of whatsoever sect, which considers any single dogma of historical christianity obligatory. Within the borders of the anglican church itself all forms of liberalism are permissible provided they preserve a modicum of external decency. But that trotting at the tail of extra-ecclesiastical idealism (of which trotting I have already spoken) is of comparatively little importance.

More important is ecclesiastical demagogy and the way in which part of the priesthood has taken up a social-reformist position. During the general strike of 1926, for example, none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury took up an even more favourable attitude towards

the strikers than did the liberals—let alone the government. And what is especially characteristic of the present stage is that this reformist demagogy goes hand in hand with extremely retrograde restoration movements in matters of dogma and ritual. We find churchman after churchman liberal in matter of their conception of life, like the former Dean of St Paul's, Inge, whom some refuse to recognise as a christian at all, prove stubborn "black hundred" fascists in social matters, whereas we find extreme ritualists and dogmatisers pouring out revolutionary chatter far away more "left" than the labour party. Such phenomena serve but to illustrate and emphasise the reactionary character of the most "purified" forms of religion and also throw lurid light on the principal function which religion fulfils in imperialist society—namely, that of muddling the proletarian masses and throwing them off the straight road. An anglo-catholic parson togged out in skirts and wot not and calling on the workers to strike against the means test or prevent the loading of arms to Japan assists in the stultifying of proletarian intelligence just as badly as the school teacher who babbles about the classless values of Shakespere.

The revival of religion among the intelligentsia

is taking place exclusively in the form of right wing, restorationist tendencies—catholicism and anglo-catholicism. The forms this restoration movement takes are a little more rational and up to date than the form taken in Russia after 1905, or the present form in Germany. Britain's catholics do not go in for theological flights such as Messrs Florensky and Berdyaiev indulged in. Here as in everything else we see a practical people who avoid unnecessary follies, which however necessary they may be for theological treatises are in practice likely to be thoroughly harmful. They preserve the irrational elements of catholicism, sacramental magic and the notion of authority, but they also know how to use "sensible" psychological and scientific deductions taken from Freud and Einstein and how to talk "common sense" about the indispensability of discipline and "hierarchy," which little word is so useful to the fascists.

Catholic tendencies among the intelligentsia have passed through a number of stages. In the 'eighties and 'nineties they were one of the tricks of the estheticism of the day, and catholicism mostly consisted in the esthetically effective parts of catholic mysticism and ritual. In the nineteen-hundreds Chesterton's catholicism was closely bound up with petty middle-class

democratism and protest against capitalism. Then emphasis was laid on the " democratic " character of medieval society which it was held was a gift of catholicism, and on the emotionally " human " element in catholicism, on its appeal to the heart, its faith in man, its cosmic optimism. A most entertaining and instructive expression of this is provided by Chesterton's *Wisdom of Father Brown* detective yarns.

After the war, when conversions to catholicism grew more frequent, it was the yearning for discipline, for authority, for a complete conception of life, which provided the chief motive. Intellectuals laid waste by the crisis of capitalism passed through a phase of turning inwards, of desire to live by their own inward values, and so came to feeling the burden of their loneliness, their lack of a great mother to whom to confess. They grew thirsty for an outward authority which might save them from that wild search for peace and from that awful hopeless isolation. And as the crisis deepened we have been able to witness how this purely subjective psychological attraction to authority gradually merged into the direct fascisation of the bourgeois intelligentsia and the growing sense of discipline to their class.

Catholicism more and more becomes the magnetic guide of the live bourgeoisie and intelligentsia pointing the road to the anti-communist citadel. The intelligentsia is steadily developing a desire to get free from its good old British lack of theorising and also from its new toy of subjectivism, and steadily beginning to see that only two possibilities lie before it—catholicism or communism. To which he should turn is the dilemma of many an intellectual, and many a man who is now a catholic had hovered for a while wondering whether to become a marxist or not.

The struggle going on in the minds of such people is, though, not so much a struggle between two classes, as one between a class and a professional consciousness. As a bourgeois the intellectual is drawn towards bourgeois ideas, and as any at-all-scientific bourgeois conception of the world is out of the question the only satisfying thing left is catholicism. Yet as a "master of culture" the intellectual senses that catholicism is hostile to him, and that to accept it is equivalent to rejecting all belief in the future. For this reason, as intellectual, the man is more and more drawn towards communism. But it is not easy to take the step. It needs too great a reconstruction of the mind, and it very soon

becomes clear that the discipline and all-embracing nature of communism do not come so easy to a bourgeois intellectual.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND SCIENCE

1: In the nineteenth century 2: The struggle against and the struggle for science 3: Wells as vulgariser of "Science" 4: Anthropologists 5: Machism in Great Britain 6: Holism 7: Physics mobilised for the defence of "God" 8: Towards Materialism

I

WE MUST BEGIN by observing that in Great Britain as in France the word *science* denotes solely the natural sciences, so that the faculty devoted to their study is simply called the Faculty of Science. This use of the word is quite proper. It is a naive expression of the fact that the bourgeoisie has been able to create a science of nature, but has been and is quite unable to create a science of society or the history of society. The Germans, being, for historic reasons we have seen, less infantile in philosophical matters than the British, early on sensed the impermissibility of such a class-limited use of the word, and already in the period of classical philosophy they extended

their word *Wissenschaft* to include the " science of the spirit." But of course even so they extended it no farther. Yet by that great effort they did temporarily succeed in concealing the limitations of the bourgeoisie in matter of scientific knowledge.

Russian intellectuals adopted the applications of the German word *Wissenschaft* for the Russian word *nauka*. Nor is there any need to revise this now, because the once vain aim of German philosophy to take in every sphere of life in scientific knowledge has been put on solid foundations by Marx, and is now in the hands of a class which is capable of extending scientific mastery of life to society and history. What was a vain academic yearning is in the U.S.S.R. now reality.

From the middle of the nineteenth century up to the present day, both in Great Britain and her cultural colony, the U.S.A., science has played a greater part than in continental countries. The great scholars of Britain and the U.S.A. and their great popularisers have acquainted vast sections of their peoples with scientific knowledge and have inoculated them with respect for science. The non-existence of a philosophic tradition or even a philosophic habit of thought has indeed resulted in science becoming the direct rival to religion, and in

Great Britain more than anywhere else the weakening of religion has been due to the influence on the popular mind of the conquests of science.

But at the same time, the non-existence of philosophy and of a " science of the spirit " has resulted in natural science extending the particular deductions of its field of enquiry to other fields of enquiry, namely, to the " spirit " and also to society. Whereas German scholars had always felt that the science of the " spirit " could not be reduced to terms of natural science, but had its own independent method—which in their hands was full of mysticism, but which, put in order by Marx, was to become one of the sources of a true proletarian method in a science of society—in Great Britain, and in America, there was a blunt extension of the scientific method peculiar and proper to the natural sciences to the study of society and history, which under nineteenth-century conditions could mean nothing better than mechanistic teachings.

This we see right back with the classical economists, who were the pioneers of a scientific discipline in the study of society to which very early they consented to give the name science. Just as Marx had to put Hegel's dialectics on a materialistic basis, he had to

treat the mechanistic conceptions of the classical economists by infusing them with dialectical blood. For a long time political economy remained an isolated phenomenon. A further extension of physical science into the region of "spirit" and society did not begin till the middle of the nineteenth century as an accompaniment to the sudden great successes of the biological sciences—which stand nearest to the social sciences.

All this placed a huge responsibility on the shoulders of British science, a responsibility towards the capitalist class which created it, and it must be said that British scientists carried out their task magnificently, with a great sense of class duty. The class character of bourgeois science has been less camouflaged in Great Britain than in continental countries. The conscious political alliance of British scientists in their scientific work has shown both positively and negatively. In the first place, British scientists have consciously re-refrained from making any deduction from science which might be harmful to capitalist society; they have consciously held back the development of science into materialism. Darwin, for example, refrained from speaking out on the bearing of his theory on christian mythology; Huxley refrains from materialistically

philosophical deductions from his openly materialistic method, and shamefacedly covers his nakedness with the shrunken shirt of agnosticism.

At the same time science tried to make definite positive social deductions from the theory of evolution. So long as liberalism ruled supreme it was the conception of a mechanistic evolution that was emphasised in darwinism, and Spencer created an evolutionary which throughout maintained a spirit of whole-hogging Manchester liberalism. But in the next stage, when the bourgeoisie began to pass to its new, imperialist ideology, it was the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest in darwinism which was emphasised, and Darwin was turned into a prophet of slavery and exploitation. In the light of these convenient interpretations we see imperialists, as they plunder natives and squeeze the last drop out of the working class, proclaiming that they are but instruments in the great work—of that evolution of higher biological forms which has brought us from amoeba to man and was now to complete the journey from Neanderthal man to such elevated forms as Disraeli and Cecil Rhodes.

The fullest expression of these tendencies we find in the work of the biologist Galton,

inventor of the "science" of eugenics, which is the final biological justification of capitalism and imperialism. And so at the opening of the imperialist era we find Darwinism expanded into a science of society and definitely taking over the task of the "dismal science" of political economy, whose rôle it was at the beginning of the century to canonise brutality to the small and the weak. And as science definitely entered the service of the industrial civilisation of capitalism it also took on the hostility of that civilisation to "art and poetry," and, being impotent—as a mechanistic system must be—to find a place in its conception of life for artistic creation, placed itself in direct and complete opposition to art as to an obsolete and useless fantasy.

2

At the end of the nineteenth century, in Great Britain as in some other countries, there was a revolt against science and the scientific view of life which was very largely a repetition at this new stage of the romantic revolt of the industrial revolution age. In both revolts, the romantic and the anti-science, there were reactionary as well as democratic elements.

But in the romantic movement feudal survivals and lesser middle-class aspirations shared the honours, whereas in the new anti-science revolt, the reactionary side, expressive of the decay of the bourgeoisie, very decidedly took on the leadership, so that the lesser middle-class democratic opposition became of less moment. This does not mean that the democratic current can be ignored, and there were parallel phenomena, though on a much smaller scale, to the peasant opposition to science led in backward Russia by Lev Tolstoy.

The democratic opposition to science throws an interesting ray of light on the democratic notions of the 'nineties and the nineteen-hundreds. The most noticeable enemies of science in this current are Chesterton and Shaw. In Chesterton a democratic protest against eugenics and certain common deductions from darwinism are all mixed up in Chesterton's demagogic and paradoxical manner with a catholic's fierce hatred of science as science—as witness against religion so that Chesterton provides us with almost a perfect caricature of the ambiguousness of the petty middle-class conception of the world and of life.

Shaw's antagonism to science is of a different order. At first glance it seems a blank and

perverse paradox, and it is true that Shaw reserved some of his most irresponsible "jokes" for this subject. But behind the outward paradoxicality there is unquestionably a healthy something. In the first place, Shaw's antagonism to science is partly a satire on the privileged caste of bourgeois scholars, principally against the medical profession and the humbug of its absolute authority and secrecy which are devised to keep laymen off its knowledge or lack of knowledge. And then we have a really sound sense of the inadmissibility of extending the mechanistic methods of the natural sciences to the science of society. It is certainly no more than a vague intuition, because Shaw himself, as fabian economist, tries to understand contemporary society by no other means than those very same mechanistic methods, and when he comes to trying to obtain a satisfactory conception of history as a whole and of the future of mankind, he can do no more than accept the bergsonian vitalistic mysticism about a "creative evolution."

But principally and in general the antagonism to science is proper to the decadent and reactionary wing of the intelligentsia. It is a decadent denial of science on the part of the esthetes of the parasitic bourgeoisie and the

bohemian intelligentsia, or else a fideistic criticism of scientific "superstition" from the right wing of the idealist reaction, especially the catholics. The last current, which in the exemplary form of Chesterton's ambiguous approach we have examined above, at first had little significance except in catholic circles, but now that the crisis of capitalism is steadily deepening it is becoming a noticeable current in the general stream of fascisation. But at least we can say that even in the right wing of the British enemies of science there is a long way yet to the state of affairs holding in Germany.

The anti-scientific reaction which came out in the decadence of the end of the nineteenth century, was ephemeral. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century romanticism was defeated by the views of science. But the romanticism of the end of the century as one might say met imperialist science half way, and the idealistic reaction ate into science, and the diseased and carrion conditions made its flesh more acceptable to the esthetes. Bergson and Mach began that adaptation of the scientific outlook to the tastes and the needs of the decadent bourgeoisie which has since gone ahead in seven-league boots.

The peace made between estheticism and

science on a basis of joint recognition of machism and the theory of values was drawn up in the quiet gardens of Cambridge where scholars possess ivory towers suitable for the most sensitive esthete. Thus post-war esthetes were able to discover in science a new source of esthetic experience, and the "scientists" themselves have agreed to say that their activity is not a search of truth which might serve even as a temporary makeshift criterion of their "values," but is the construction of systems which are only true in so far as they are logically pretty.

3

This philosophical adaptation of the scientific world view to the needs and possibilities of a bourgeoisie in decay began very early, but for a long time it went on only in rather lofty and limited academic spheres, and did not touch the mass of the intelligentsia. It was only the conditions on the eve of the present crisis, and the apparent absence of any prospects for capitalistic rationalisation, which brought these questions of scientific philosophy out into the open. The fundamental line of the exploitation of science by the British intelligentsia until

quite recently remained philosophically naive and in that sense typically British—because, as is notorious, in France and Germany these matters stand differently. In France, though there is no great philosophical creation, every intellectual while still in the secondary schools is given a solid grounding in one definite philosophical tradition, and in Germany philosophy rivals music as the basic grounding of a cultured man and provides the principal course for the growth of ideas. But in Great Britain philosophy is a little lawn owned by a narrow clique and well set about with notices "keep off the grass." On this lawn gentle scholars play a special kind of croquet, and are far from any thought of doing anything so unpleasant as take on leadership of thought. It stands on about the same level as the other beloved British game—the parlour game of composing Greek "verse."

The result is that huge layers, including the uppermost, of the literary, scientific, and engineering intelligentsia live through their whole life without ever caring a damn about philosophy. Here of course we have a result of the British empiricism we have already considered, and this was once as it were justified by the position the country once occupied, that is, in the days when it was leader of

capitalistic progress. But to-day, in the face of the backwardness of engineering in the coal-mining industry and the cotton industry, that empiricism has become one of the symptoms of the diseased backwardness of British capitalism in general.

The principal literary exponent of the naive scientific view of life which rules among the engineering and scientific intellectuals and among those university intellectuals who are neither pre-occupied with literature nor with the Greeks is H. G. Wells. The very essence of Wells is an indestructible faith in applied science and in a conception of evolution transferred from biology to sociology. There is no need to discuss the philosophic basis of such a world view. One can only speak of certain half-conscious philosophical views associated with this world view and ranging from mechanical materialism to pragmatism and bergsonism and even to a more or less pure-blooded christian fideism. This last we meet with in America, where philosophical naivety is even greater than in Great Britain—a brilliant example of which is the famous physicist Millikan, who manages to combine a naive physical realism with a belief in an almighty god. But the principal ingredient is really positivism, which is the least exacting of

all philosophies and the most suitable for bourgeois scientific experts who have long lost all contact with religion.

This faith in applied science and in evolution was still possible in the years of imperialist boom and the years of capitalistic rationalisation after the war. Whereas the delicate and sincere mind of Bertrand Russell without being able quite to understand it did feel the contradictions and the lack of future for "the highest historic stage" of capitalism as Lenin christened it,[1] the less sensitive philistines were able to make themselves blinkers out of the superficial phenomena of increased production and dizzy booms, and so prevent the ripening contradictions from making them restive.

The writings of Wells are characteristic of such people, especially his popular compendia *The Science of Life*, *The Outline of History*, *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*. With these three books Wells attempted to re-do the encyclopædic works of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. The difference between the works of the fathers of positivism and their distant descendant enables us to measure the distance passed by the organisation of bourgeois culture from the days of the happy flowering of industrial capitalism.

[1] Lenin : *Imperialism*, Little Lenin Library, p. 13.

Comte, a mammoth among philistines, and Spencer were big figures. Their encyclopedias are the works of a lifetime. How little like them is Wells, with his journalistic pace and the assistance of a whole staff of assistants. He is a regular literary Bedaux system. But it is no less interesting to observe in what Wells copies Comte and Spencer and even exaggerates—namely, what proportion of his work he devotes to the natural sciences and what portion is reserved for human society. On the natural sciences we have the *Science of Life*, the first chapters of the *Outline of History*, in which he outlines geological and paleontological history up to the appearance of man, and the chapters of *Work, Wealth and Happiness* in which he describes technical processes. On man we have the main part of the *Outline* and the sociological and economic chapters of the third book.

In the first Wells is a talented, brilliant populariser, quite on a level with the latest acquisitions of bourgeois science and, though perhaps a little at sea when dealing with methods and problems, certainly well acquainted with all deductions from the natural sciences and the processes of the application of those sciences. From the point of view of their political content I have already dealt with

the chapters which deal with mankind and society in the second chapter of this book, and I have pointed out their complete impotence to reach any kind of generalisation. They cannot fail to produce a painful impression on any reader fairly well-grounded in methodology. From the point of view of method they are a scrappy piece of patchwork of mechanistic atomism and idealism. The enquiry deals exclusively with the individual, and the principal factor in the individual is considered to be psychology.

Society, for Wells, does not consist of classes connected by tangible productive relationships, but of psychological types. The character of any class for Wells is not determined by its place in the process of production, but by the psychology of the individuals of which it consists. Progress is considered purely and simply as a matter of handing on knowledge, and knowledge is acquired solely by the superior classes. The priest and the dividend-drawer are the guiding beacons of mankind, a truth discovered before Wells by the father of positivism, Auguste Comte himself. Agrarian civilisation was founded by priests and emperors. Science appeared in the form of disinterested speculation in the minds of slave-owners whose ample income

and leisure were guaranteed them by their slaves. . . .

All these marvellous deductions are not merely Wells's delivery of a social order; they are all the logical deduction of every little positivist and mechanist. Being powerless to direct the history of society, the bourgeoisie is also powerless to know it, in so much as it does not know that link which, if pulled upon, draws up the whole chain. But as the bourgeoisie cannot find the link, and does not even know that it exists, it is powerless to prove either the effectiveness, or the actuality of its opinion, and so is condemned to occupy itself in weak fingering with its paralytic fingers a number of arbitrarily selected abstractions and arbitrarily chosen categories.

4

In the light of these methodological problems the sole attempt since political economy arose, to produce a discipline of social knowledge—the science of social anthropology, which consists of the study of primitive society and in Great Britain has been granted the title "science"—is of special interest. Bourgeois

anthropology arose as a pendant to darwinism. The original purpose of this study was to depict primitive society as a means of marking off the enormous distance travelled by man from primitive savages to the enlightened bourgeoisie type of the reign of Victoria.

Early anthropology certainly had the additional task of dealing with the survivals, in its own world, of primitive world conceptions. Tylor, for example, used his conception of animism by applying it to the modern world and exposing the cruder forms of religion as survivals of savagery. But that way of looking at progress was a knife with two edges, because as soon as a man admitted that there was a system of society quite different from capitalism in the past it was open to him to start thinking that capitalist society might not be going to last for ever in the future. That is why bourgeois anthropology skirted carefully round the economic problems of primitive society and confined itself to a history of views of life and death. On that level, and helped out by the weakening of men's faith in progress, anthropology could be a breeding ground for historical relativism and for that individualistic and anti-moral revolt against victorian morality of which I have spoken in Chapter Three.

The idealistic positivist character of early anthropology was also conditioned by its task in the service of industrial capitalism. Industrial capitalism made no attempt to utilise primitive society by its direct exploitation. It either smashed the primitive order in order to make a market and obtain labour power, or simply exterminated the natives and took their territory. This principle was applied very largely by the U.S.A., under the guidance of the gentle maxim that " the only good Indians are dead ones," and as a result American anthropology has remained peculiarly abstract and mechanistic. Now in order to accomplish this method (the " good Indian " method) it was hardly necessary to study the victims first, and as for the first method, all that was required was a good corps of missionaries to study the opinions of the " savages " sufficiently to be able to destroy them as efficiently as possible, and so turn them into naked Fridays on a naked mother soil.

With the onset of imperialism the task changed. Imperialism does not aim at destroying " native " society. On the contrary, it aims at taking advantage of its more backward and reactionary traits, in order to utilise the native social machinery and traditional beliefs in magic as instruments for the exploitation of

the natives. Anthropology then becomes a very essential factor in colonial administration. It collaborates in the elaboration of " scientific " imperialism, which is a complex system of wholesale utilisation of the native apparatus of society and animistic magic for the express purpose of maintaining the natives in that state to which " it pleased god to call them."

The prophet of this new scientific imperialism was the Governor of Nigeria, Lugard, who created there a system of administration which labour party social fascists find " exemplary " ; and which is much respected by the liberal intellectuals, who contrast the scientific imperialism of Lugard to the crude methods employed by the planters of Southern Rhodesia and Kenya, who go smashing up the native system of society and, merely to satisfy their own narrow momentary interests, forget all about the vaster interests of the whole class of imperialists. So the anthropologist at last obtains a concrete constructive task : to study " savage " society with the end of adapting it to the needs of imperialist exploitation. This provides the " science " with the " link " and at the same time enables it to get outside a purely mechanical approach and obtain a conception of primitive society as a whole.

Indeed, anthropology is the only social

science which has made a step ahead in this period of decay of capitalist civilisation if we compare the period of industrial capitalism, and moreover a step towards dialectics ; only a little step, it is true, and a very cramped one, but still, for such a period, a big step. It is this achievement which gives rise to the quite exceptional popularity which anthropology enjoys in the widest layers of the intelligentsia, and which makes it exemplary of scientific approach outside the sphere of natural science. One of the most striking figures of contemporary British intellectual life is the principal anthropologist of the new imperialist type, Bronislaw Malinowski, professor of social anthropology at the London School of Economics.

By origin he is a Pole, like Conrad (which detail serves to emphasise the international " pan-European " character of imperialism). He has produced a series of profound studies of his favourite little corner of Melanesia, namely, the Trobriand Islands, which present a concrete and impressive picture of a matriarchal society based on mattock agriculture. But at the same time in his position as lecturer and publicist he is a tireless champion of the practical utilisation of anthropology as servant of imperialism.

But Malinowski is not merely a scholar. He is a man of his age, and in his labours for moribund imperialism he manages to find some satisfaction for " the heart." He colours his works with a discreet wash of erotic lyricism, in particular idealising the sexual life of young Melanesians. It is amusing to compare his *Sexual Life of Savages* (1929) with Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage à Bougainville* (written 1772, published 1796). Diderot also utilised the sexual arrangements of a primitive culture—Tahiti—for the purpose of erotic lyricism. But the philosopher of rising capitalism does not idealise at all the same side of it as the scholar of the period of capitalism's decline. Diderot insists that with all their sexual freedom there on Tahiti the obligation holds—that every union should result in offspring. But Malinowski, on the contrary, emphasises that the young Melanesian female is able to do all she pleases and live with whomever she will with the one condition that there is no offspring before marriage.

Diderot idealises freedom in the sexual union in so far as intended for procreation. He is struggling against the cramping bonds of feudal and petty bourgeois marriage. Malinowksi describes the barren sexual play of the Melanesians—and pretty much in detail too—

in order to defend the desire of a bourgeoisie in decline to have all the sexual delights possible without the responsibility of children. This same development of sexual enjoyment plus prohibition of children plays a great part in contemporary English literature (and life). Complete sexual freedom, in so far as no children result, is one of the basic moral demands put forward by Bertrand Russell. In Aldous Huxley's Russellian utopia we find that "erotic play" is a subject studied from childhood, whereas childbirth is looked on as the greatest possible shame and indecency. *The Sexual Life of Savages* raised Malinowksi's prestige among the intelligentsia to an astonishing degree. Even without that Malinowski stood very high, not merely as scholar, but also as a cosmopolitan and skeptic, a man scornful of the cramped life of Britain and free of British inhibitions—though of course, as we see, all that is no let to his serving British imperialism very faithfully.

Imperialist anthropology is the only social discipline which has in part succeeded in becoming a science by freeing itself from abstract mechanistic notions. It is characteristic that anthropologists who specialise in the primitive society of the past and consequently are less closely bound up with imperialist

practice, not only maintain a mechanistic standpoint, but even intensify it most pugnaciously. In academic circles the principle champion of mechanistic materialism is considered to be Elliot Smith. Elliot Smith rejects the standpoint of the comparative anthropologists Tylor and Frazer as idealistic, and from his materialistic standpoint considers the only tenable view is the diffusionist, that is to say, the view which holds that the elements of civilisation proceed from some single source (considered by Smith to be Egypt) where they arose as the result of a chance combination of circumstances not likely to be repeated.

It was in polemics with Elliot Smith that the practical anthropologists *à la* Malinowski worked out their imperialistic standpoint. But it would be a grave mistake to imagine that the diffusionists are to be looked on as liberals and democrats in contrast to imperialist Malinowski. Elliot Smith is teacher and adviser to none other than Wells, and is the very man who has provided the most extreme and explicit form of the theory according to which the first agricultural civilisation (the neolithic) resulted from the germination of a special class of priests and kings. The classless tribal societies of Europe and Asia are represented as imitating

their agriculture from the Egyptian theocrats. It is interesting to note that a concrete *historical*, as distinct from *theoretical*, confutation of this view has only been made possible by the researches in historical botany made by the Soviet academist Vavilov.[1]

5

The adaptation of the scientific conception of the world to the needs of the bourgeoisie of the period of decline began in Great Britain, as in other countries, back in the last years of the nineteenth century. At that time Great Britain, despite its philosophical frivolity, had produced a machist of European dimensions in K. Pearson. " The Philosophy of Pearson," Lenin wrote in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (p. 32). . . excels that of Mach in integrity and thoughtfulness." Thanks to the absence or at least weakness in Great Britain of production of petty philosophers following greater ones and clouding the issue, Pearson could trace his pedigree directly from the pre-Kantian classics Berkeley and Hume (cf. Lenin, op. cit., pp.

[1] Cf. " The Problem of the Origin of the World's Agriculture," Professor N. I. Vavilov, in *Science at the Crossroads*, London, 1931.

150, 151, and this work generally). At the same time the class caution of his forerunners, the English agnostics, which did not permit the making of any materialistic deductions from materialistic method, made it impossible for materialism to be recognised in the scientific world. That was why " to Pearson the desire to appear as a materialist is foreign," and " he simply considers his views as well as those of Mach as ' idealist ' " (Lenin, op. cit., p. 32).

From the point of view of European philosophy this trick, as Lenin observes, was most " incautious " since it stripped the materialist disguise from the shivering bodies of continental machists. It was only because in Great Britain both Darwin and Huxley had been so cautious that Pearson could allow himself the luxury of being so incautious. But Pearson's lack of caution did not stop there. He did not merely reveal the idealistic nature of Mach's philosophy. He also made clear the class nature of that idealism. Pearson was not merely a reactionary in the theory of knowledge. He also fought shoulder to shoulder with Galton for eugenics and for the most reactionary imperialist deductions from darwinism. (We find the same combination of machism with reactionary " biologism " in the latest *History of Science* by Wingfield-Stretton.)

Pearson represents an early stage of British machism. He was necessary to experts in the general struggle with materialism, but still had not become an indispensable component part of the general intellectual view of life. The second stage is marked by the machism of Bertrand Russell—who is the central philosopher of the progressive British intelligentsia of the epoch of imperialism. With Russell we see machism losing the specific British traits given it by Pearson. He has no clear-cut logical discipline—fruit of direct study of the pre-German classics of philosophy—nor do we find in him either an open identification of machism with idealism, nor any connection with right-wing bourgeois currents.

Russell is a " socialist," and he puts his form of machism forward as a system which supersedes both materialism and idealism. A machism of that kind obviously needed a new label, and Russell has supplied it—" neutral monism," which is equivalent to Bogdanov's " empiriomonism." Russell also has in common with Bogdanov the evident unity in principle between subjective idealism and mechanicism —the first proceeding from the latter. Just as Bogdanov with his tectology tried to create a " general " science by reducing all distinguishable categories of matter in movement down

to mechanical formulæ, Russell began his activity with a book, *Principles of Mathematics*, in which he tried to create a universal system of logic as a foundation to which all phenomena of existence should be reducible.

As original thinker Russell is limited to his works in mathematical logic, which all date from pre-war days. These works have assured him an honourable place in the history of bourgeois thought; they are the pillars of Hercules of a mechanistic method of isolation and logical progression from less abstract to more and more abstract.

As a machist Russell presents no particular signs of originality. He can indeed hardly be accounted a philosopher. But as a publicist of philosophy he is really interesting, as it is in his work that the conception of life of the passive liberal bourgeoisie of the epoch of the general crisis of capitalism has received its most characteristic exposition. The conception consists in a contemplative subjectivism which permeates all spheres with great thoroughness —a subjective idealism in all matters of positive knowledge, a subjectivism of autonomous values in the spheres of ethics and esthetics, and in the sphere of politics a liberalism which places the value of the individual above the objective tasks of society. He is quite free from

any temptation to relate his values to any transcendental reality whatsoever (and as far as this goes he can be called an "atheist") Hence his pessimism. He is also equally free of any such thing as striving to get beyond the boundaries of observation in order to influence or change objective existence.

6

Russell's example enables us to see how reactionary philosophy during the process of degradation of bourgeois civilisation is combined with more and more "left" political standpoints. In Pearson's day a reactionary scholar could be perfectly satisfied by a subjective idealism which was a big step backwards from materialism, even if only from the shamefaced materialism of the progressive scholars. In Russell's time though, machism came to be the need of a scholar turned "socialistic"; whereas the reactionaries now needed more extreme forms of idealism. The British bourgeoisie created these more extreme reactionary forms in the philosophy of "holism."

Holism stands for a whole series of scientific and philosophic currents linked together by a

critique of the mechanistic method of isolation and quantitative analysis, and by a demand for knowing the whole (ὅλος) as concrete unity and identity. The word holism was invented by a hero of British imperialism who is not without some fame—the South-African general, one-time Premier, Smuts, who spends what time he has to spare from his imperial deeds on the study of nature and "scientific" philosophy, and one of whose books was met by the South-African poet Roy Campbell with the following quatrain :

The love of Nature burning in his heart
Our new St. Francis offers us his book.
The Saint who fed the birds at Bondleswaart.
And fattened up the vultures at Bull Hoek.

Bondleswaart and Bull Hoek being a native tribe and settlement which were bombed or bombarded during Smuts's premiership (Bull Hoek, 1921—Bondleswaart, 1922).

Holism was preceded by the teaching of "emergent evolution" developed by Alexander and Lloyd Morgan. Correctly criticising mechanistic materialism for ignoring qualities, and for reducing phenomena of richer content, such as life, to the level of less

rich phenomena, Alexander and Lloyd Morgan reject the mechanistic resultant—i.e. treatment of a sum of phenomena as a simple sum—and put forward a conception of "emergents"—of resultants qualitatively differing from the sum of the elements which in combination produce them. The simplest form of emergents adduced by them are chemical compounds. This certainly was a step towards dialectics, though still a very one-sided, partial step, much too insufficient to free them from their mechanistic bonds. In this theory of emergence the dialectical law of the transformation of quantity to quality was stripped of all the wealth and many-sidedness of marxism and given a formulation which is in essence mechanistic.

But even this step towards marxian dialectics was taken only in order to cast mud at materialism. While Alexander and Lloyd Morgan (who up to the war was what Lenin calls a "shamefaced materialist") do sometimes criticise subjective idealism very tartly, they do it not from the left, but from the right, not from the standpoint of materialism, but from the standpoint of a fideistic dualism, which admits the reality of matter, but considers it only a lower reality, which is subject to a higher transcendental reality. They consider the facts of "emergence" as manifestation of a miraculous

force, akin to Bergson's life force, and it is their suggestion that our attitude towards this phenomenon should be one of " natural piety " as towards a manifestation of the divine creative will !

Holism arose from a dove-tailing of the above ideas with the notions of pragmatism while " mastering " the subjectivism of this asserting " religious experience " to be an expression of real existence. While attacking mechanistic materialism these holists have directed far more blows at the materialist part than the mechanistic. They admit mechanicism as relatively valid, and from its insufficiency, instead of making the deduction that a better scientific method is required, they make the deduction that there is a limit to the sphere of application of scientific method. According to them science can know positively only what is abstract, whereas what is concrete can be known only by intuition.

That is to say, in so much as knowledge remains a matter of intuition, mechanicism has remained in force. It is indeed characteristic of the mechanistic roots of holism that one of the leading holists, Professor Whitehead, collaborated with Russell in his *Principles of Mathematics* and drew no line between his own views and Russell's mechanistic results. Thus

science was regarded as the proper sphere of mechanicism, and if one is to liberate oneself from this it is regarded as necessary to reject science altogether and place one's faith in direct all-embracing intuition. Intuition of this type is proper to poets and mystics. Wordsworth and Shelley knew more of nature than Darwin or Faraday. Intuition enables us to know " wholes," and the first whole is lord god almighty.

When we compare it with machism we see that holism marks a distinct step to the right from bourgeois liberalism. Russell's pure machism, logically rounded off by the theory of values, is a pure subjectivism, individualism, liberalism, the primacy of the free individual over the social organisation. Holism on the contrary submits the subject (individual) to a supreme " whole," and robs him of the right to be his own criterion, relates his subjective values to the supreme objective reality. Russell's subjectivism is a final step towards a liberalisation of religion, whereas Smuts's and Whitehead's holism is a step in the opposite direction, towards the restoration of the authority of divine revelation and of class discipline.

By reserving such an eminent position for poets and artists holism has had a great

influence on the young generation of highbrows. "Classicism," which thrusts forward the "whole," form, and construction, against romantic introspection and chaos, delights in backing up its esthetic views with holistic arguments. In the battle formation of the fascising bourgeois ideologies, holism occupies a position on the right sector, and the only force on its right is the revived medieval dogmatism of whole-hog catholics.

7

This influence of holism on wide groups of the literary and artistic intelligentsia, which has been observable since about the year 1925, is one of the manifestations of the general theoretical mobilisation which has now begun to take hold of science and scientific philosophy. The action of general political causes has been reinforced by the new and deepened crisis of bourgeois physics. The work of Heisenberg, Schroedinger, and Dirac has revealed facts which have furnished new "confirmation" of the "disappearance of matter," a confirmation all the more convincing since the mechanistic mode of thought of bourgeois scholars has

been incapable of giving those facts a materialist explanation.

The physical and mathematical sciences suddenly obtained a popularity they had not had for a long time. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries every forward leap in the popularity of the positive sciences marked a victory over feudal priestly obscurantism. But now, in the period of imperialism, these sciences owed their popularity to the circumstance that their new achievements presented the bourgeoisie with arguments not against religion, but in its favour, not in favour of a general scientific view of the world, but against it.

Indeed, even before the discovery of the "principle of inconsecutivity"—the quantum theory—and of wave theory the new views of physics and mathematics were beginning to soak into wider groups of the intelligentsia. As early as 1920 the theory of relativity was widely known by name. The highbrows delighted in it, though of course they took it up in their usual snobbish condescending way, as a kind of conundrum or crossword puzzle superior enough to serve as demonstration of the superiority of *their* brains. With what a smack they repeated Einstein's dictum that there were only five to six people in all the world who could understand the theory of relativity,

and with much greater a licking of lips his declaration that when he read Eddington's exposition of his own theory he couldn't understand a word of it. Dabbling in the theory of relativity and theories which bordered on it became just the same kind of mark of intellectual superiority as dabbling in money theories in economics or in Russell's mathematical logic.

Now really wide sections of the intelligentsia took up the theory and made vulgar deductions from it which fitted in with the general skepticism common after the war. At the same time an idealist view of mathematics, as of an aprioristic system which could be constructed in complete independence of experience, became very popular among the highbrow intellectuals and, especially in Cambridge, they began boosting science as a source of esthetic delight. But scientific idealism never has become a generally popular phenomenon.

The active propaganda of idealist physics was begun in 1929 by Eddington's book, *The Nature of the Physical World*, which was written purposely for the general mass of the intelligentsia. It was followed—with the crisis already in full swing—in 1930 by Jeans's *Mysterious Universe*, which was written in still more popular a

style and immediately sold in hundreds of thousands of copies. In spite of the blatant philosophical confusion of both books it is impossible not to admit that they are brilliant popularisations. The philosophical naivety of the British reader and no less of the British scientist is so immense that however shocking the philosophical tangle they do not mind.

From Huxley onwards bourgeois science in Great Britain has always been famous for its popularisations, and Messrs Eddington and Jeans have utilised this marvellous schooling of popularisation technique to destroy the scientific conceptions of their own teachers. Jeans is a particularly brilliant populariser. His earlier and less "combative" *The Universe Around Us* (1929), a popularisation of the latest views of capitalistic astronomy, is translated into Russian and merited it. The *Mysterious Universe* (1930) is written with magnificent verve and in such a way that the reader really does all the time get the impression that he understands the author.

Both Eddington and Jeans are mathematicians, and at the basis of their work is that "mathematical cretinism" which is so widespread among bourgeois mathematicians, and consists in regarding mathematics, "queen of

the sciences," as a purely deductive construction completely independent of all practical experience ; and for this reason makes them so enraptured if it happens that some mathematical equation actually turns out to be true. Both writers are particularly *épatés* by the part played by Planck's quantity "*h*" as a stable unit in quantum mechanics. This astonishment and delight is the very starting-point of Eddington and Jeans's philosophising. Quite Aristotelian ![1]

The obvious logical deduction from all this is a severely rational form of absolute idealism, making the world an emanation of superior intelligence and known to man in so far as he achieves such superior intelligence. And exactly such a deduction is made by Jeans. Without even bothering to prepare us with any proofs of the existence of a deity he announces that it is clear that god is a "great mathematician" and that the universe is a thought in the consciousness of god. But Jeans's wings do not seem to be strong enough to maintain him at that great height. Such rationalistic idealism in a pure form would not at all suit the present-day bourgeois mind—and Jeans, as we have seen, is hardly what one could call a philosopher.

[1] Aristotle, remember, has told us that "amazement is the beginning of philosophy."

We find him quite unable to manage such restive philosophical abstractions as this of the world being a thought in god's mind, and in the end it turns out that all the pother was all no more than a passing flicker in the mind of Sir James Jeans.

But at the same time the new physics is packed so full of lovely weapons against materialism that it would be a pity to make only light of it. For example, the "principle of indeterminacy"—what a lovely little sledge-hammer for putting scientific determinism out of shape! And before you can say Robinson there it is all neatly proved that the electron is fitted up with free will, and, well, after all, if electrons are so furnished, it goes without saying man has been fitted up long enough ago, and it's fling wide the gates for every possible brand of medieval priestly humbug right down to original sin and eternal torment.

Indeed, the lack of discrimination in the choice of means which Jeans and Eddington show is almost indescribable. Yet one hardly likes to put it down to sheer "simplicity." Thus, in one place, Jeans proves the complete analogousness of time to the other three dimensions, the complete isotropy of time, and in another he bases his arguments on the

absolute validity of the second law of thermodynamics, which is quite incompatible with a representation of time as convertible. Thus, in one place, Eddington proves to us that the world revealed by science is an unreal world, and then in another proves that the world of common sense is unreal for the very reason that the only real world is the world revealed by science. Both of them constantly, without any system, just when it suits them, use arguments of subjective and objective idealism. The only constant thing is that their idealism, whatever the brand, is inseparable from mechanicism.

For example, Eddington opens his book with a fable about two tables. We have two tables in front of us. One is a wooden table covered with a cloth, one of those material tables of everyday experience and common sense. The other table is one revealed by science, and it consists of protons and electrons, whirlwinds and deserts. It seems to him logically beyond question that these two tables cannot be the same table. Then, proceeding from what he calls the "obvious" fact that they are two different tables, he passes to proof that the real table consists of protons and deserts, so that consequently it is the material table that is not real. Then he quite "forgets" that

he managed to prove the unreality of the wooden table by means of the reality of the "scientific" table, and it is now the "scientific" table which turns out to be—equally—non-existent.

Both books are written with great verve and fervour. Neither book is polemical. Neither Eddington nor Jeans reckon on an opponent. They are busier rejoicing at the proof of the "existence of god" than preparing to defeat an opponent. And it is true no opponent was to be seen, though his presence nearby might have been felt. Highbrow Aldous Huxley, whose self-appointed task it is to register year by year the moods of the intelligentsia, in his novel *Point Counter Point* has depicted for us an intellectual who is a communist, a character named Illidge, who is assistant to the famous scholar Lord Tantamount, and made of him a miserable impotent opponent of the bourgeois view of life.

Poor Illidge. Another of the characters remarks that he is "a communist. Which means he's committed to nineteenth-century materialism. You can't be a true communist without being a mechanist. You've got to believe that the only fundamental realities are space, time, and mass . . ." (*Point Counter Point*, p. 213). As a communist (Mr Huxley's

brand) he is obliged to reject Einstein, Eddington, quantum theory and so forth. What a revelation this is of the state of information of highbrow highly educated Mr Aldous Huxley in matters of marxism ! No Bloomsbury skeptic would dare write a word about catholicism if he knew so profoundly little.

In the bourgeois camp broad circles of academic intellectuals with the old scientific weekly *Nature* went over to the idealist position. The highbrow younger generation, on the look-out for new esthetic experiences, were delighted at the new hopes put before them, and rushed to tear the wrappings from the wonderful new "science" and revel in its complicated dizzy mathematical constructions, with those thrilling unexpected coincidences with actual experience, and that heart-moving vacancy of a world liberated from nasty matter and reduced to a ballet of whirlwinds. When Sullivan interviewed all the most famous mathematicians and astronomers, Einstein, Planck, Brolier, Dirac and Heisenberg with one voice assured him that the latest science was not in any way in contradiction with religion.

The first attacks on Eddington and Jeans were made from the right, by persons who felt all the danger there was in those subjective

and skeptical arguments for the defence and restoration of religion, persons hostile to a scientific world view as such, or perhaps merely more practiced in philosophy, and considered that such confusion in philosophy as that of Jeans and Eddington was a danger, as it might compromise the holy task of restoring religion by the help of "science."

8

This was all a family quarrel, though, a squabble not about principles, but about tactics. Soon there arose another enemy, much more terrible and serious. The events of 1931 stirred up the working class and threw over to its side considerable sections of the intelligentsia. Those events sharpened the class struggle not only on the political and economic fronts, open fighting began on the philosophical front too. This was assisted by the publication, shortly before, of the English translation of Lenin's *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, and by the arrival of a delegation from the U.S.S.R. to the International Congress on the History of Science and Technology held in London that year. It was mere chance that this congress

should take place immediately before a maximal point of the crisis, but there was no chance about the impression which the contributions of the Soviet delegates made,[1] an impression which brilliantly reflected the superiority of scientific thought in the world of socialist construction to what purports to be scientific thought in the world of decaying capitalism. It became clear that communism certainly does not demand any "belief" in the mechanistic materialism of the nineteenth century, but on the contrary puts forward a complete scientific philosophy which does not only extend science by a method for the study of society, but is also able to give a powerful stimulus to a revival of the natural sciences and to point the way out of the blind alley into which the decline of the bourgeoisie has driven them.

From the autumn of 1931, in all British universities and in wide circles of the left intelligentsia, the study of dialectical materialism began. The fruits of this study are not as yet very obvious, but nevertheless a young generation of scientists and scholars is growing up which will be able to combat effectively the advance made by the bourgeoisie on the

[1] These reports have since been published under the title of *Science at the Crossroads* (Kniga, London).

philosophical front, and to do so from the philosophical standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat.

The movement towards dialectical materialism is not confined to the revolutionary younger generation. Many scholars who were unable to accept idealism and had maintained a standpoint of mechanistic materialism were also stirred by the events of 1931 and by conversation with Soviet scholars. But there is much to hinder any complete reconstruction of such men, and sometimes the only result of their awakening is that they fall right back into the hands of reaction.

The most typical of those scholars is Lancelot Hogben, research professor of social biology at the London School of Economics. He is a prominent experimenter and author of *The Nature of Living Matter* (1930). Up to 1930 or 1931 Hogben was one of the main fighters against idealism, especially against the holists. The main line of his polemics consisted in revelation of the unscientific, arbitrary fideistic nature of the idealistic deductions made from the latest discoveries. In order to discredit the scientific claims of those deductions, Hogben now produced a theory of division of all our convictions into "the public field of knowledge" and "the private field of sentiment."

By limiting the field of science to that which can be positively verified by experimental methods, and by classifying the whole sphere of ideas as a private affair, Hogben rejected the possibility of a generally obligatory dogmatic idealism, and at that particular stage his arguments did play a certain positive part in the struggle against the "scientific" idealists. But all this contrasting of "public knowledge" with "private opinion" after all merely proceeded from premisses of subjective idealism and once again, if that were necessary, revealed how indestructibly subjective idealism is bound up with mechanistic materialism.

And within that conception of "private opinion" nestled that good old theory of values, that same old liberal individualism which recognised no criteria for private convictions. This is why it is that when the dialectical materialism of Marx and Lenin with its clearcut formulation of the principle of the class nature of knowledge as the basis of social sciences was put forward, Hobgen staggered back from such a form of materialism, and declared that marxist dialectics are "scholasticism" and "metaphysics" and the party (class) conception—"inquisition." Thus the liberal individualist proved unadapted to life in the pure

atmosphere of real "practical materialism" and turned into one of the most energetic enemies of communism in Great Britain.

A much greater step towards dialectical materialism has been made by another prominent London scholar, H. Levy, professor of mathematics at the Imperial College of Science (University of London). In his book *The Universe of Science* (1932) on a whole series of fundamental methodological questions Levy gives formulations completely in the spirit of dialectical materialism. He insists on scientific knowledge being conditioned by its social character and pours cold water on Hogben's flaunting of an "ethical neutrality" on the part of science.[1] But so far he remains within the field of the precise sciences and the method by which they are reached, and does not show the possibility of a science of society; and though he does not make this explicit, nevertheless he leaves us with the impression that the field of social study lies outside the scope of science. And until he admits the principle of the class (party) nature of knowledge as a fully worked-out criterion of practical action, until

[1] Cf. Levy, *The Universe of Science*, p. 220: "Since . . . no piece of scientific work, when we include its external relations, can really be divorced from the social function to which it contributes, science can be no more ethically neutral than the purposes for which production is undertaken."

he welds his scientific materialism and his unquestionable sympathy towards working-class victory into one, Levy cannot be admitted to be a dialectical materialist.[1]

[1] His more recent work, contained in the difficult form of a series of discussions between himself and representatives of various fields of culture, given during the winter season of 1931–1934 by the B.B.C., marks a certain step ahead. Cf. *The Web of Thought and Action* ; also *Science and Irrational Society*, both by H. Levy.—A. B.

CHAPTER SIX

THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND COMMUNISM

1 : The lefts and the labourists 2 : The intelligentsia and the C.P.G.B. 3 : Marxism and "marxism" 4 : Another species of "marxism"—Middleton Murry 5 : The intelligentsia and communism—John Strachey 6 : The intelligentsia and revolution.

1

IN THE 'TWENTIES of this century the general mass of the intelligentsia of the British ruling class and the petty middle class was foreign to any interest in the working class. Even the most sincere pacifists, genuinely revolted by the indecency and monstrosity of capitalist civilisation—pacifists like Siegfried Sassoon—never even thought of the possibility of uniting their individual protest with the class protest of the working class.

One can judge of the gulf dividing the intelligentsia from the proletariat by the fact that the October revolution, which had an enormous influence on the working class, scarcely moved the intelligentsia at all. A typical intellectual standpoint was that of

Wells, who saw the October revolution merely as a prelude to the 1921 famine and a step towards barbarity, and the new economic policy as a final renunciation of any attempt to remake the world.

There were numerous bourgeois liberals who felt sympathy for the U.S.S.R., but their enthusiasm was intimately bound up with that intellectual infatuation for Russian literature and interest in the land of Dostoievsky and Chekhov—they were *of course* quite above politics. And there were other liberals of the same class who understood the revolution to be a radical democratic affair which as such called for their support, and a typical activity of these was to make great study of Soviet legislation—on marriage and education. And there were still others whose interest consisted in a sentimental patronising stance towards those "poor" "weak" Russians, and still others who looked on it all from a formalist standpoint as "this interesting Russian experiment."

But in their "own" working class, their "own" fellow countrymen of the proletariat, these intellectuals of the 'twenties were interested practically exclusively as raw material out of which to make their own careers. The growth of the labour party and the decline of

the liberal party made it advantageous to such persons to make up to the "labour movement." This was all the easier since there still is a very live social snobbery among British workers—a tendency to look on members of the "better" classes as their natural commanders—which makes the official labour party astonishingly prone to fling wide its doors to any forager who comes nosing over from the other side (provided, of course, that he is sufficiently "superior"). Thus in those years one saw ambitious young fellows from the aristocracy, the upper ranks of the middle class, and the bourgeois intelligentsia just stroll straight across into parliament as "labour men," while a crowd of young men from Oxford and Cambridge went straight into the labour party executive or became secretaries of big "labour" leaders or else, as lecturers on history or sociology or political economy, dabbled with "socialistic" ideas.

2

The world crisis, which struck Britain with special force and was underlined by the simultaneous victories of socialist construction in the U.S.S.R., brought about a sharp change in the state of affairs. With astonishing rapidity the intelligentsia, and in particular the younger

generation of it, began to discard their disdain for politics and take their places in the various parties. This revival of political interests was accompanied by the growing need for theory, a growing thirst for replacing the shattered hulk of the old British empiricism by a more reliable conception of life. And the conscious way in which some of them weld their craving for a world-conception with the political or even the economic aspect of the crisis is really most remarkable. I recall a conversation with a writer, a typical intellectual, who had been moulded in the Eliot–Wyndham Lewis complex of ideas—highbrow classical leanings—in the summer of 1931, not long before the August crisis. He was indignant at the impotence of bourgeois economists and financiers to put a quick end to the rapidly growing crisis, and spoke of communism as the only means of putting an end to the putrid state of affairs, and of marxism as the only philosophy capable of providing a basis for the introduction of order in the economic sphere.

Events forced the highbrow younger generation to recognise the supremacy of politics in history and the economic basis of history. But they came to this understanding already choked up with the idealistic demands compounded in the school of "classicism." Classicism

itself was an expression of a sharpening of the class struggle in the conditions of post-war imperialism, and, as such, an expression too of the growing demand for a discipline, for the party spirit, and for an all-embracing ideological reaction to the events of the moment. The sharpening of the crisis drew yesterday's "classicists" towards marxism as a teaching which insisted on the supremacy of politics and economics. But though they were drawn towards marxism as a scientific and materialistic teaching, through their idealistically pragmatic upbringing they laid all emphasis on the scientific basis and on the way marxism hangs together as philosophical system, and on its successfulness in relating the complex phenomena of reality to a unitary system of criteria. Now, the fact that the materialistic method was a fundamental condition of that successfulness, was the very reason why they turned to marxism, but as they accepted marxism they left that basis in the shade. What became important in their eyes was not the materialistic dialectical method, but the resultant fact that marxism provides a well-built system of criteria. System, system, system—that is what British intellectuals run crying after as soon as they lose faith in aforementioned Nanny empiricism.

If all the intelligentsia were to be attracted towards communism purely as a means of quenching a thirst for a philosophy of life, it would not be worth much. But however hopeless most of those who suddenly took up marxism and leninism may be, the mere fact of their turning that way is significant of the unquestionable fact that a change has taken place in the objective position not merely of the lesser middle-class intelligentsia, but also of the more privileged sections. The crisis of 1921 which started mass unemployment of industrial workers and made it a permanent feature of British economy, spared the intelligentsia and the black-coated class. But the crisis of 1930 and the following years struck them with comparatively the same painful force as the proletariat and provided a factual foundation in fact for their sharp radicalisation.

Of prime importance is the growing radicalisation of the teaching profession and the students, two valuable strategic groups in that the first is in intimate contact with the masses of the nation, and the second hitherto had been producing largely basic cadres for the anti-revolutionary, fascistically active section of the bourgeoisie—as in 1926, when units of students composed the core of the strike-breaker army mobilised against the general strike. At the

same time the intelligentsia, as a professional group, has begun to ask itself if it would not be better for it if the unquestionably decadent ruling classes were replaced by the class which, in spite of all ruling and petty middle-class expectations, in the U.S.S.R. proves to be such a powerful and real friend of science and civilisation. In this intellectual desertion of the bourgeoisie and their attraction towards the proletariat no small part has been played by the reports of scholars and experts on the renaissance of scientific and in fact all cultural creative work in the land of socialist construction. There is no doubt either but that German fascism (national "socialism") will play an equally great part, as it provides such a lovely object lesson of what the only alternative to communism looks like and what civilisation and the intelligentsia may expect of fascism.

3

These movements among the intelligentsia take place at the very moment when the ruling class of Great Britain has greatest need of intellectuals for the purpose of fooling the proletariat and retaining it within the bounds of "legality." And the intelligentsia would not

be itself were it not able to produce an army ready to play the rôle. One of the methods of doing this is a method long tried on the continent—that, now the working classes have begun to awaken and demand marxism, of serving them marxism, but so carefully boned and steamed and garnished that instead of a revolutionising, it has a soothing, soporific effect.

Work in this direction had been going on even before the crisis. G. D. H. Cole, a veteran in this culinary art, has from his academic eminence at Oxford been busy preparing many young people in the art of pot-roasting Marx (or cooking Marx in his own steam in order to de-marx him). Cole has not been alone. Lindsay, the master of Balliol, is also a " marxist." His " marxism " consists in turning Marx into an heir to the theory of natural law. But falsifications as naive as this are more curiosities than anything else, though of course they are symptomatic. They cannot compare with the soufflés and other creations of Mr Cole.

From his school has come A. L. Rowse, whose book, *Politics and the Younger Generation*, written before the crisis, but published after it, has become one of the most curious documents of the present historic stage. The fundamental task of the book is to direct young

persons of the bourgeois intelligentsia, who when the book was written were still unpolitical, into political life, and to guide them to support the official labour party. Its political stance is essentially labour party executive. Rowse sees in the British Empire something both natural and indispensable, the main guarantee of peace in the whole world. He merely "protests" against wild imperialists and slave-owners of the Kenya plantation type are contrasted unfavourably by him with the scientific imperialism of Lugard (see Chapter V) as carried out in the "model colony" Nigeria.[1]

For the neo-marxist Rowse the political past of Great Britain is such that "no socialist need be ashamed of it" (op. cit., p. 15). His notion of the evolution of state authority is that during the last few hundred years power has glided from the hands of an all-powerful monarch into the exclusive possession of an alliance of agrarian and commercial interests, and thence to the industrial middle class, whence finally it has dribbled to the possession of the people itself (cf. Rowse, op. cit., "Social Transformation," p. 60, et seq.). But perhaps

[1] Cf.: ". . . for example, there is the model British Imperialism in West Africa, which aims at training natives to self-government, to place against the crude methods of East and South Africa," p. 294.

the most delightful piece of nonsense in the book, so wonderful an illustration of the *tempo* of our age and the impotence of the bourgeoisie to understand what is afoot—is the passage in which Rowse speaks of the Kreuger & Toll company as "one of the greatest and most progressive of modern financial corporations." Of course, when the book was written the Kreuger exposure had not occurred, and one could hardly expect a "marxist" of that school to be critical of so powerful a company. And thus does Mr Rowse propagate marxism !

But it must be admitted that he does not profess to be a marxist. He merely *uses* marxism as a means of raising the prestige of politics—particularly "socialistic" politics—by linking them with a great scientific conception. His aim is to confer a kind of blessing of marxism on the labour party bosses. He addresses himself to the whole younger generation of the bourgeois intelligentsia, and baits them with "unquestionable" coming successes of labourism and consequently fine cribs in parliamentary life and in the ministries—whereas in their intellectual rôle he offers them the satisfaction of marxism as a "system."

He removes, of course, everything which might make the lads shy. He is patient in explaining that the "marxist conception of

history " makes no demand of recognition of philosophical materialism, and as witness of this remarkable " rowsing " discovery he quotes—Benedetto Croce. For Mr Rowse the " marxist conception of history " merely means that it is easier to understand history and politics if you start from *interests*, especially *group interests*, than if you start from " values " like religion, or art, which he leaves alone as a sort of playground for the individual when free from the displeasing pressure of the group. Rowse finds that marxism explains more, and with more economy of thought (" That is where the marxist technique is useful," p. 246) and so marxism is expedient.

Rowse's attempt may look pretty poor, and certainly has no attraction whatsoever for the working class. But Rowse's job is not with them. His is concerned with young people who are most naturally drawn the labour party way towards fascism. He has a live sense of the generally fascist mood of the " young generation " and speaks of a marvellous system of " instinctive " understanding, of agreement regarding the situation, which " runs unmistakably through " the younger generation (op. cit., p. 28).

After the political crisis of 1931 and the shameful conduct of the labour party " leaders "

in that crisis, Rowse's chances among the younger generation were considerably diminished. The attempt at an intellectual revival of labourism made by Rowse's instructor, Cole, and the attempt to create a sort of new fabian society (The Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda—or the S.S.I.P.) produced no sort of revival; and its successor, the socialist league, is failing as signally.

4

After 1931 labourism finally took on a monstrous and morbid form. Since then it maintains itself (as far as political "theory" goes) exclusively by inertia, especially the elephantine inertia of the powerful reformist trade unions. It is now only possible to create active social-fascist leaders for the purpose of holding back the left-moving proletariat from revolution under the cover of revolutionary phrases and by taking up a position as near as possible to the revolutionary vanguard of the working class. This task is fulfilled by the Independent Labour Party, and one of its principal means, long tried out on the continent, is the working of Marx and marxism in a direction exactly opposed to the interests of the proletariat.

The peculiarity of the standpoint of the independents in comparison with their continental colleagues consists in the fact that in Britain there has so far not existed any really large mass adoption of a perverted marxism, as in the continent. Till quite recently the Independent Labour Party was not "marxist" at all. It was only at its 1932 conference—mark well the date!—that it recognised marxism as its official doctrine. There are also two special factors in Great Britain which influence the situation. One is that these independents have not the marxist knowledge of the Otto Bauers and the Kautskys, and this makes them theoretically much more childish, much less competent to deceive the intellectuals thirsting for a "system." The other is that in the working class marxism is much more firmly associated with leninism.

The right-wing social-fascists openly, directly identify marxism with leninism (as Cole in his foreword to the new Everyman translation of the first volume of *Capital*). This obliges "left" social-fascists, if they want to be marxists at all, to be leninists too. A little book by independent labourist Maxton on Lenin is extremely characteristic of these "lefts." Of course, in the first place, the book was written after 1931 and came out in 1932. This book

contains a host of inaccuracies, down to such misrepresentations as that Lenin ever described the I.L.P. as a " revolutionary party."[1]

Maxton's principal trick in this talentless, shoddy, hastily compiled bid of brummagem is detaching Lenin from the party and representing him as a kind of isolated Napoleon who forced his will on the people by means of a small group of assistants. The natural corollary to this is that a successful proletarian revolution can only be made if such a genius as Lenin be available (though in what respect the genius of Lenin differs from that of Bismarck or Mussolini, Maxton does not make clear) and as, for the present at least, Maxton himself does not lay claim to such genius it means we must wait until capitalism automatically breaks up and the Independent Labour Party comes to power by " constitutional " means.

Maxton's book is intended only for the simplest and least politically informed sections of the workers. For the intellectuals who are being drawn to marxism, and the radicalising

[1] The text refers to the resolutions of the All-Russian May Conference of the Russian Social-Democrat Labour Party, 1917. The text reads : " There are the revolutionary internationalists who have started a struggle against the war. . . . Such are . . . the Left Wing of the British Socialist Party and the Independent Labour Party in England. . . . " By inserting a comma after " British Socialist Party " Maxton equates the " Independent Labour Party " as a whole with the " revolutionary internationalists," whereas the resolution specifies clearly only the left wing of this party. Cf. Lenin, Vol. XX, 2, p. 406, and Maxton's book, p. 120—A. B.

units of the mass labour party, meat at one and the same time both stronger and better disguised is required, and among all the other attempts to serve up Marx, one of the most interesting is Middleton Murry's " *The Necessity for Communism.*"

I have already had occasion to refer to this man a number of times—as a prophet of miracles *à la* Dostoievsky, and as a preacher of " values." In wide sections of the lesser middle-class intelligentsia and among workers who are bourgeoisified—especially in the provinces —he has had considerable influence ; and when, after the crisis of 1931, he offered his services to the independents, they received him with open arms, and he became a sort of official theoretician for them. From the commencement of 1932 he revived a monthly which had formerly been an organ of the romantics—*the Adelphi*—and at the same time out came his *The Necessity for Communism.* In both publications he declared he was a marxist.

On the dust-cover of *The Necessity for Communism* there was a list of the author's books. He included titles like *To the Unknown God*, *The Life of Jesus*, and *God : An Introduction to the Science of Metabiology.* Very promising for a communist, what ! And certainly this person's

communism is a peculiar thing. Communism, oh yes, very necessary ; communism, oh yes, that's marxism, and yet we learn that the first duty of a communist in Great Britain is to struggle in every possible way against the communist party of Great Britain—and the second duty is to exert all one's strength to avoid in Great Britain anything like the Russian revolution.[1]

But the author has written his book so clumsily, so childishly, that he spills the beans all over the place, though they are so widely scattered and on such bean-coloured soil that it needs a keen eye for beans to detect them. This is what it comes to : a revolutionary crisis in Great Britain is inevitable ; unless the victory of the proletariat is accompanied by its spiritual regeneration, the British revolution may bring the same " inhuman horrors," (pp. 10, 12, *et alia*) as in Russia—in support of which horrors, lo and behold, our old and notorious friend the Riga Correspondent of *The Times* appears in the form of a telling quotation (pp. 11, 12) ; then, " Russian communism " inevitably brings with it " ghastly inhumanity to men like you and me " (p. 13).

[1] " Candidly, I have far more hope of reaching the ' reds ' than the ' whites.' But the book is not primarily addressed to them. It is addressed to people who are neither the one nor the other." Murry, *Communism*, Foreword, p. 10.

What wonderful class truth! Then, "we—I mean the majority of those who will read this book—are bourgeois" (p. 75), and "we must resolve to be on the winning side" (pp. 74, 75), as "this is the fundamental condition of conscious ['humane,' D.M.] control of the transition moment" (p. 74). Then MacDonald and Snowden were unquestionably sincere, when they set about forming the "national" government, but they committed a great mistake when they let the working class escape from their influence; and in order not to let the communists (put by the author in inverted commas!) get control of the revolution it is indispensable for the "labour party to be made Marxist [*sic*] and revolutionary [*sic*] once more" (p. 91).

In short, it is indispensable so to arrange it that when the revolution does begin in Great Britain the labour leadership itself contrives to realise that "humane control" preparatory to full-dress fascism which was so successfully achieved in Germany by Messrs Scheidemann, Ebert, and Noske. Evidently Murry reserves a slightly different rôle for himself and his brother independents—that of their German counterparts under Kautsky.

In itself this is none of it so very new. But what is interesting is that, throughout, Murry

goes the whole hog with the revolutionary dictionary—for example, he speaks of *communism* throughout, never *socialism*. This is a vital symptom. But the most novel thing of all is what Murry tries to make of Marx. There he really has broken virgin soil and records too. Marx "belongs to the company of the great Hebrew prophets—of whom the most universal was Jesus ! (p. 20).

"But unless the history of Jesus is understood, the history of Marx is really unintelligible" (Note 2, p. 172). Chapter II. of this entertaining book tells us that Marxism has distorted the work of Marx just as Christianity has done that of Jesus—"Marxism does not include Marx himself" (p. 30). Earlier we learn (p. 22) that Marx principally called on the "Judæo-christian passion of disinterested sympathy." According to Marx the revolution must be a triumph of disinterestedness, but—this is the burden of Chapter V.—the proletariat is self-seeking (and is that so very surprising ?) and it is for this reason that it must be got under the "humane control" of Middleton Murry and kindred spirits ("you and me").

The sense of historical materialism, Murry goes on, is that it points to the moment at which economic conditions become such that

" disinterestedness " can really be accomplished. In its time catholicism achieved the maximum possible approach to the disinterested order " under feudal society (Chapter VI.). But communism will only come when all people become " disinterested." The horrors of Russian communism are " due, really, to the utter political and social backwardness of Russia." In fact, it " *ought* [Murry's emphasis, D.M.] to have been a bourgeois revolution." But, unfortunately, in Murry's eyes " There *were* no bourgeois in Russia " (once again the emphasis is Murry's ; cf. Note 23, p. 135). Bolshevism is " Russian communism," sufficiently good for the Russian workers, who were made into savages under tsarism. What we need is a more humane, less " simplified " communism, a communism which would not reject, but which would critically adopt religion —which would not refuse the British ' values ' of liberalism and individualism "—in short, a nice gentlemanly true-blue communism. And Murry manages to stuff his dummy Marx with respect for all kinds of English things, and goes into raptures on the merits of British bourgeois civilisation and ends with an announcement that " the Englishman is too ' decent ' to allow such inhuman horrors to be perpetuated " (p. 11).

It is instructive to compare the attitudes taken by Rowse and Middleton Murry towards the U.S.S.R. For both of them leninism and the socialist practice of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) is the 'Russian national form' of socialism. But their attitude towards "Russian communism" differs, and although Murry is a "left" and Rowse a right social fascist, Rowse is not so openly anti-communist, he is "friendlier" to the Soviet Union. Of course, he finds that the price in Russia paid for socialism was "almost too great." But this is not the fault, rather the misfortune of the bolsheviks. Tsarism is responsible for the high price. It would of course have been more satisfactory for the general socialist cause if the first victorious socialist revolution had been not the Russian one with Lenin at the head, but the German one with Ebert. But all the same it is fine that there is one socialist country in the world. Soon there will be a second—Great Britain. Each in its own way. Backward Russia, bolsheviks and dictatorship, and progressive Britain, having that past of which "no socialist need be ashamed," the labour party, and parliament.

This phenomenon—the right social fascist being more sympathetic to the country of working class dictatorship than his "left"

comrade—which might at first thought seem strange, is easily explained. Rowse cannot perceive any directly revolutionary movement in the British working class, he is still pleasantly assured that " Russian socialism " is impossible in Great Britain. His particular audience—that of intellectuals and trade union bosses—is certainly not likely to get infected with a desire to make an October revolution in Britain. And so, in his blissful innocence, he can argue dispassionately about the successes of soviet industry, and favour friendly relations with the U.S.S.R. as one of the foundations of a " socialist " foreign policy, and at the same time work towards a " socialism " at home which would be but a labouristic fascism.

Murry on the other hand already is aware that the British workers are inevitably becoming revolutionised, and so the only way to " save " the British working class from " Russian communism " is to fashion a home-made article labelled with a lion and " Communism—Buy British." By spattering his pages with the words *communism* and *revolution*, and at the same time " exposing " real communism, Mr Murry maintains a very important sector of the bourgeois front—a sector which in the near future will prove decisive.

5

As a contrast to Murry's book, and typical of the intellectuals who are rapidly moving left we may take John Strachey's *Struggle for Power*" (1933). Strachey is a characteristic example of a bourgeois intellectual who has gone over to the proletariat. From the very outset he differed from his one time companions in career. He entered the labour party but did not merely utilise it as spring board into a career. He really did stand up for the working class.

He differed too, in his seriousness. He is one of few who really have studied Marxism through and through from the sources. All this did not preserve him from fluctuations. When the crisis was ripening in the early months of 1931, and when it broke in August, Strachey already realised that one way out of the crisis was the communist way out, and yet, while he still thought there were other roads, he did not want to take the communist one. He then thought that the "national socialism" of Mosley was an alternative way, and he was one of the founders of Mosley's "New Party." But, though with some delay, Strachey did eventually realise what sort of a way out was that proposed by Mosley, and offered by Mosley

to the working class, and immediately that he understood that the only alternative to fascism was communism, he broke with Mosley.

He turned out to be an honourable reformist. Though he preferred reformism to revolution, still he had wanted reform in the interests of the working class, and when he grasped the impossibility of the reformist path for the working class, and the impossibility of a "national" solution, he crossed over to the revolutionary camp, British and international. The Communist Party of Great Britain, taking account of his fascist exploit, quite naturally was a little cautious. Strachey was not offended, and this is a great merit in an intellectual. He did not retire from politics, but took up work as a rank and file intellectual.

His book *The Struggle for Power* is a typical intellectual's book, written for intellectuals. It is concerned with the collapse of the bourgeois world and civilisation and points to communism as the only way out. He gives an analysis of the political situation which is generally speaking pretty thorough, and in a basically correct criticism of the bourgeois economic quackery, especially the theories of the inflationists and the creditarians like Keynes and Major Douglas.

He openly tackled the question, not from

the standpoint of the working class, but from the standpoint of the interests of human civilisation. One clearly feels that had there been any possibility of preserving the bourgeois system healthy and progressive, Strachey would not have been for changing it, but inasmuch as he sees the impossibility of so preserving it and the impossibility of it being progressive, he courageously and irrevocably takes his stand with the class which alone can save civilisation, even though this be at the price of jettisoning its bourgeois content.

The bourgeois intellectual nature of Strachey's communism is specially marked in the chapters devoted to literature, where he tries to represent Lawrence, Joyce and Eliot as revolutionaries and rebels—that is to say, to represent symptoms of the disease which are, objectively, part of the struggle against it, as participants in that struggle. But with all its natural defects Strachey's book is unquestionably a pleasing symptom. It gives the measure of that shift made in the intelligentsia which compels it to recognise the revolutionary proletariat as the sole defender of civilisation and the proletarian revolution as the sole hope of civilisation.

An interesting trait in Strachey's book is that he quite clearly and concretely represents

the victorious communist revolution as the only alternative. As a marxist he understands the fantastic nature of the utopias of Russell and the impossibility of the development even of a super-fascist *scientific* civilisation on the ruins of bourgeois democracy. The development of science is only possible on the basis of an expanding production, and no form of capitalism can achieve that. If the communist revolution is not achieved, the sole prospect is that of a speeding up of the barbarisation of the world and the economic collapse of bourgeois society till it reaches a new medieval period. This theoretically is all true enough. But what is characteristic of Strachey's bourgeois roots is that he spends so much time on this aspect. One feels that he wants to persuade both himself and the reader that compared with that awful future the victory of communism is the "lesser evil" for all bourgeois intellectuals. But all the same, once he gets over that little trouble, Strachey (and he is typical in this of many intellectuals) takes the side of the proletariat with complete sincerity and complete loyalty.[1]

[1] It is interesting to compare Strachey's own statement in *Left Review*, No. 3 (December, 1934).—A. B.

6

With all its desirability this turnover of the intelligentsia towards communism has another side, especially if we take into account the peculiar psychology of British workers, who have for generations been trained in empiricism—I mean their "restraint," their "taciturnity," their dislike of speaking of things they don't do and even of speaking of the things they do do. It has been said that a British workman will be more ready to take a rifle in his hands for the revolution than to vote for the communist party. British workers are always more left in deeds than in words.

The attraction towards the communist party is only the extreme expression of the radicalisation of broad layers of the petty middle class, and to some extent of the bourgeois intelligentsia. Socialist clubs are active in all the universities, and though they mostly take up a reformist standpoint and contain many future fascists, they also do include a good number of sincere reformists who merely have not yet come to disillusionment in the reformist path, and soon will do so.

The interest in the U.S.S.R. is enormous and the interest in marxism is growing. In the course of the 1931–1932 academic year a

number of clubs to the left of the reformists were founded. To-day there are, in the London School of Economics, *The Marxist Society*, in Oxford, *The October Club*, while in Cambridge the old *Heretics* now has a marxist leadership and a radically inclined membership. In all this fermentation of course there is much snobbery and fashion—(though when communism becomes fashionable it certainly is a symptom !) and much youthful nonsense (in one college a group of communistically inclined students have begun by shooting practice) and much emotion-mongering easily likely to blow yesterday's young "marxist" into to-day's fascist camp. But everywhere there is healthy young growth ; cadres are already forming, cadres who will be able to weld together a genuine sympathy for the cause of the revolutionary proletariat with a more sound theoretical preparation than has formerly been available.

The same process is going on in the most democratic of the intellectual professions—the teaching profession. *The League of Educational Workers* which has entered the Red Trade Union International is growing, in spite of the repression (any active member of the League is inevitably, sooner or later, dismissed) and it is taking a very active part in the work of propaganda for communism and soviet construction.

The intelligentsia, though, differs from the working class in that it talks more than it does. The working class will not give voice till the moment comes to act. But the importance of the intellectual developments is that when the hour comes, the British proletariat will have at its disposal cadres of an intelligentsia ready to serve it, and in which the lower middle-class intellectuals socially nearer the proletariat will work solidly together with the better qualified " masters of civilisation " of the upper layer of the intelligentsia, clear that civilisation to-day is inseparable from the task of proletarian revolution.